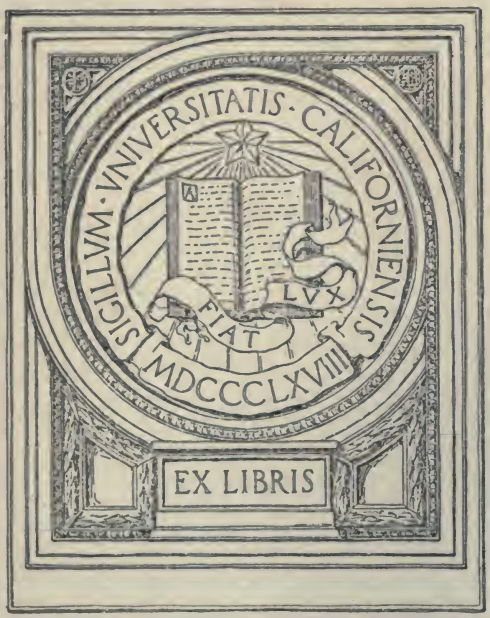
LADY BOUNTIFUL

GEO. A. BIRMINGHAM


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LADY BOUNTIFUL

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORN

BY

GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM

Author of "Spanish Gold," "Innisheeny"
etc., etc.



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PART I

I

LADY BOUNTIFUL

SOCIETY in the west of Ireland is beautifully tolerant. A man may do many things there, things frowned on elsewhere, without losing caste. He may, for instance, drink heavily, appearing in public when plainly intoxicated, and no one thinks much the worse of him. He may be in debt up to the verge of bankruptcy and yet retain his position in society. But he may not marry his cook. When old Sir Tony Corless did that, he lost caste. He was a baronet of long descent, being, in fact, the fifth Corless who held the title.

Castle Affey was a fine old place, one of the best houses in the county, but people stopped going there and stopped asking Sir Tony to dinner. They could not stand the cook.

Bridie Malone was her name before she became Lady Corless. She was the daughter of the blacksmith in the village at the gates of Castle Affey, and she was at least forty

years younger than Sir Tony. People shook their heads when they heard of the marriage and said that the old gentleman must be doting.

"It isn't even as if she was a reasonably good-looking girl," said Captain Corless, pathetically. "If she had been a beauty I could have understood it, but—the poor old dad!"

Captain Corless was the son of another, a very different Lady Corless, and some day he in his turn would become Sir Tony. Meanwhile, having suffered a disabling wound early in the war, he had secured a pleasant and fairly well-paid post as inspector under the Irish Government. No one, not even Captain Corless himself, knew exactly what he inspected, but there was no uncertainty about the salary. It was paid quarterly.

Bridie Malone was not good-looking. Captain Corless was perfectly right about that. She was very imperfectly educated. She could sign her name, but the writing of anything except her name was a difficulty to her. She could read, though only if the print were large and the words were not too long.

But she possessed certain qualities not very common in any class. She had, for instance, quite enough common sense to save her from posing as a great lady. Sir Tony lost caste by his marriage. Bridie Malone did not sacrifice a single friend when she

became Lady Corless. She remained on excellent terms with her father, her six younger sisters, and her four brothers. She remained on excellent terms with everyone in the village.

In the big house of which she became mistress she had her difficulties at first. The other servants, especially the butler and the upper housemaid, resented her promotion and sought new situations. Bridie replaced them, replaced the whole staff with relatives of her own.

Castle Affey was run by the Malone family. Danny, a young man who helped his father in the forge, became butler. Sarah Malone, Susy Malone, and Molly Malone swept the floors, made the beds, and lit the fires. Bridie taught them their duties and saw that they did them thoroughly. Though she was Lady Corless, she took her meals with her family in the servants' hall and made it her business to see that Sir Tony was thoroughly comfortable and well-fed. The old gentleman had never been so comfortable in his life, or better fed.

He had never been so free from worry. Bridie took over the management of the garden and farm. She employed her own relatives. There was an ample supply of them, for almost everyone in the village was related to the Malones. She paid good wages but she insisted on getting good work, and she never allowed her husband to trouble about anything.

Old Sir Tony found life a much easier business than he had ever found it before. He chuckled when Captain Corless, who paid an occasional visit to Castle Affey, pitied him.

"You think I'm a doddering old fool," he said, "but, by gad, Tony, the most sensible thing I ever did in my life was to marry Bridie Malone! If you're wise you'll take on your step-mother as housekeeper here and general manager after I'm gone. Not that I'm thinking of going. I'm seventy-two. You know that, Tony. But living as I do now, without a single thing to bother me, I'm good for another twenty years—or thirty. In fact, I don't see why the deuce I should ever die at all! It's worry and work which kill men, and I've neither one nor the other."

It was Lady Corless' custom to spend the evenings with her husband in the smoking-room. When he had dined—and he always dined well—he settled down in a large arm-chair with a decanter of whisky and a box of cigars beside him.

There was always, summer and winter, a fire burning on the open hearth. There was a good supply of newspapers and magazines, for Sir Tony, though he lived apart from the world, liked to keep in touch with politics and the questions of the day. Lady Corless sat opposite him on a much less comfortable chair and knitted stockings. If there was any news in the village, she told it to him, and he

listened, for, like many old men, he took a deep interest in his neighbour's affairs.

If there was anything important or curious in the papers, he read it out to her. But she very seldom listened. Her strong common sense saved her from taking any interest in the war while it lasted, the peace, when it was discussed, or politics, which gurgle on through war and peace alike.

With the care of a great house, a garden, and eighty acres of land on her shoulders, she had no mental energy to spare for public affairs of any kind. Between half-past ten and eleven Sir Tony went to bed. He was an old gentleman of regular habits, and by that time the whisky-decanter was always empty. Lady Corless helped him upstairs, saw to it that his fire was burning and his pyjamas warm. She dealt with buttons and collar-studs, which are sometimes troublesome to old gentlemen who have drunk port at dinner and whisky afterwards. She wound his watch for him, and left him warm and sleeping comfortably.

One evening Sir Tony read from an English paper a paragraph which caught Lady Corless' attention. It was an account of the means by which the Government hoped to mitigate the evils of the unemployment likely to follow demobilisation and the closing of munition works. An out-of-work benefit of twenty-five shillings a week struck her as a

capital thing, likely to become very popular. For the first time in her life she became slightly interested in politics.

Sir Tony passed from that paragraph to another, which dealt with the future of Dantzig. Lady Corless at once stopped listening to what he read. She went on knitting her stocking; but instead of letting her thoughts work on the problems of the eggs laid by her hens, and the fish for Sir Tony's dinner the next day, she turned over in her mind the astonishing news that the Government actually proposed to pay people, and to pay them well, for not working. The thing struck her as too good to be true, and she suspected that there must be some saving clause, some hidden trap which would destroy the value of the whole scheme.

After she had put Sir Tony to bed she went back to the smoking-room and opened the paper from which the news had been read. It took her some time to find the paragraph. Her search was rendered difficult by the fact that the editor, much interested, apparently, in a subject called the League of Nations, had tucked this really important piece of news into a corner of a back page. In the end, when she discovered what she wanted, she was not much better off. The print was small. The words were long and of a very unusual kind. Lady Corless could not satisfy herself about their meaning. She folded the

paper up and put it safely into a drawer in the kitchen dresser before she went to bed.

Next day, rising early, as she always did, she fed her fowls and set the morning's milk in the dairy. She got Sir Tony's breakfast ready at nine o'clock and took it up to him. She saw to it that Danny, who was inclined to be lazy, was in his pantry polishing silver. She made it clear to Sarah, Susy, and Molly that she really meant the library to be thoroughly cleaned. It was a room which was never occupied, and the three girls saw no sense in sweeping the floor and dusting the backs of several thousand books. But their sister was firm and they had learnt to obey her.

Without troubling to put on a hat or to take off her working apron, Lady Corless got on her bicycle and rode down to her father's forge. She had in her pocket the newspaper which contained the important paragraph.

Old Malone laid aside a cart-wheel to which he was fitting a new rim and followed his daughter into the house. He was much better educated than she was and had been for many years a keen and active politician. He took in the meaning of the paragraph at once.

"Gosh!" he said. "If that's true—and I'm not saying it is true; but, if it is, it's the best yet. It's what's been wanted in Ireland this long time."

He read the paragraph through again, slowly and carefully.

"Didn't I tell you?" he said, "didn't I tell everyone when the election was on, that the Sinn Feiners was the lads to do the trick for us? Didn't I say that without we'd get a republic in Ireland the country would do no good? And there's the proof of it."

He slapped the paper heartily with his hand. To Lady Corless, whose mind was working rapidly, his reasoning seemed a little inconclusive. It even struck her that an Irish republic, had such a thing really come into being, might not have been able to offer the citizens the glorious chance of a weekly pension of twenty-five shillings. But she was aware that politics are a complex business in which she was not trained. She said nothing. Her father explained his line of thought.

"If them fellows over in England," he said, "weren't terrible frightened of the Sinn Feiners, would they be offering us the likes of that to keep us quiet? Bedamn, but they would not. Nobody ever got a penny out of an Englishman yet, without he'd frightened him first. And it's the Sinn Feiners done that. There's the why and the wherefore of it to you. Twenty-five shillings a week! It ought to be thirty shillings, so it ought. But sure, twenty-five shillings is something, and I'd be in favour of taking

it, so I would. Let the people of Ireland take it, I say, as an instalment of what's due to them, and what they'll get in the latter end, please God!"

"Can you make out how a man's to get it?" said Lady Corless.

"Man!" said old Malone. "Man! No, but man and woman. There isn't a girl in the country, let alone a boy, but what's entitled to it, and I'd like to see the police or any one else interfering with them getting it."

"Will it be paid out of the post office like the Old Age Pensions?" said Lady Corless.

"I don't know will it," said her father, "but that way or some other way it's bound to be paid, and all anyone has to do is to go over to what they call the Labour Exchange, at Dunbeg, and say there's no work for him where he lives. Then he'll get the money. It's what the young fellow in that office is there for, is to give the money, and by damn if he doesn't do it there'll be more heard about the matter!"

Old Malone, anxious to spread the good news, left the room and walked down to the public house at the corner of the village street. Lady Corless went into the kitchen and found her three youngest sisters drinking tea. They sat on low stools before the fire and had a black teapot with a broken spout

standing on the hearth at their feet. The tea in the pot was very black and strong. Lady Corless addressed them solemnly.

"Katey-Ann," she said, "listen to me now, and let you be listening too, Onnie, and let Honoria stop scratching her head and attend to what I'm saying to the whole of you. I'm taking you on up at the big house as upper house-maid, Katey-Ann."

"And what's come over Sarah," said Katey-Ann. "Is she going to be married?"

"Never mind you about Sarah," said Lady Corless, "but attend to me. You're the under-housemaid, Onnie, so you are, in place of your sister Susy, and Honoria here is kitchen-maid. If any one comes asking you questions that's what you are and that's what you're to say. Do you understand me now? But mind this. I don't want you up at the house, ne'er a one of you. You'll stay where you are and you'll do what you're doing, looking after your father and drinking tea, the same as before, only your wages will be paid regular to you. Where's Thady?"

Thady Malone was the youngest of the family. Since Dan became butler at Castle Affey, Thady had given his father such help as he could at the forge. Lady Corless found him seated beside the bellows smoking a cigarette. His red hair was a tangled shock. His face and hands were extraordinarily dirty. He was enjoying a leisure

hour or two while his father was at the public house. To his amazement he found himself engaged as butler and valet to Sir Tony Corless of Castle Affey.

"But you'll not be coming up to the house," said Lady Corless, "neither by day nor night. Mind that. I'd be ashamed for any one to see you, so I would, for if you washed your face for the Christmas it's the last time you did it."

That afternoon, after Sir Tony's luncheon had been served, Danny, Sarah, Susy and Molly were formally dismissed. Their insurance cards were stamped and their wages were paid up to date. It was explained to them at some length, with many repetitions but quite clearly, that though dismissed they were to continue to do their work as before. The only difference in their position was that their wages would no longer be paid by Sir Tony. They would receive much larger wages, the almost incredible sum of twenty-five shillings a week, from the Government. Next day the four Malones drove over to Dunbeg and applied for out-of-work pay at the Labour Exchange. After due inquiries and the signing of some papers by Lady Corless, their claims were admitted. Four farm labourers, two gardeners, and a groom, all cousins of Lady Corless, were dismissed in the course of the following week. Seven young men from the village,

all of them related to Lady Corless, were formally engaged. The insurance cards of the dismissed men were properly stamped. They were indubitably out of work. They received unemployment pay.

After that, the dismissal of servants, indoor and out, became a regular feature of life at Castle Affey. On Monday morning, Lady Corless went down to the village and dismissed every one whom she had engaged the week before. Her expenditure in insurance stamps was considerable, for she thought it desirable to stamp all cards for at least a month back. Otherwise her philanthropy did not cost her much and she had very little trouble. The original staff went on doing the work at Castle Affey. After three months every man and woman in the village had passed in and out of Sir Tony's service, and every one was drawing unemployment pay.

The village became extremely prosperous. New hats, blouses, and entire costumes of the most fashionable kind were to be seen in the streets every Sunday. Large sums of money were lost and won at coursing matches. Nearly every one had a bicycle, and old Malone bought, second hand, a rather dilapidated motor-car. Work of almost every kind ceased entirely, except in the big house, and nobody got out of bed before ten o'clock. In mere gratitude, rents of houses were paid

to Sir Tony which had not been paid for many years before.

Lady Corless finally dismissed herself. She did not, of course, resign the position of Lady Corless. It is doubtful whether she could have got twenty-five shillings a week if she had. The Government does not seem to have contemplated the case of unemployed wives. What she did was to dismiss Bridie Malone, cook at Castle Affey before her marriage. She had been married, and therefore, technically speaking, unemployed for nearly two years, but that did not seem to matter. She secured the twenty-five shillings a week and only just failed to get another five shillings which she claimed on the ground that her husband was very old and entirely dependent on her. She felt the rejection of this claim to be an injustice.

Captain Corless, after a long period of pleasant leisure, found himself suddenly called on to write a report on the working of the Unemployment-Pay Scheme in Ireland. With a view to doing his work thoroughly, he hired a motor-car and made a tour of some of the more picturesque parts of the country. He so arranged his journeys that he was able to stop each night at a place where there was a fairly good hotel. He made careful inquiries everywhere, and noted facts for the enlightenment of the Treasury, for whose benefit his report was to be drawn

up. He also made notes, in a private book, of some of the more amusing and unexpected ways in which the scheme worked. He found himself, in the course of his tour, close to Castle Affey, and, being a dutiful son, called on his father.

He found old Sir Tony in a particularly good humour. He also found matter enough to fill his private note-book.

"No telling tales, Tony, now," said the old man. "No reports about Castle Affey to the Government. Do you hear me now? Unless you give me your word of honour not to breathe what I'm going to tell you to anybody except your friends, I won't say a word."

"I promise, of course," said Captain Corless.

"Your step-mother's a wonderful woman," said Sir Tony, "a regular lady bountiful, by Jove! You wouldn't believe how rich everybody round here is now, and all through her. I give you my word, Tony, if the whisky was to be got—which, of course, it isn't now-a-days—there isn't a man in the place need go to bed sober from one week's end to another. They could all afford it. And it's your step-mother who put the money into their pockets. Nobody else would have thought of it. Look here, you've heard of this unemployment-pay business, I suppose?"

"I'm conducting an inquiry about it at the present moment."

"Then I won't say another word," said Sir Tony. "But it's a pity. You'd have enjoyed the story."

"I needn't put everything I'm told into my report," said Captain Corless. "A good deal of what I hear isn't true."

"Well, then, you can just consider my story to be an invention," said Sir Tony.

Captain Corless listened to the story. When it was finished he shook hands with his father.

"Dad," he said, "I apologise to you. I said—— There's no harm in telling you now that I said you were an old fool when you married the blacksmith's daughter. I see now that I was wrong. You married the only woman in Ireland who understands how to make the most of the new law. Why, everybody else in your position is cursing this scheme as the ruin of the country, and Lady Corless is the only one who's tumbled to the idea of using it to make the people happy and contented. She's a great woman."

"But don't tell on us, Tony," said the old man. "Honour bright, now, don't tell!"

"My dear Dad, of course not. Anyway, they wouldn't believe me if I did."

II

THE STRIKE BREAKER

THE train was an hour-and-a-quarter late at Finnabeg. Sir James McClaren, alone in a first-class smoking compartment, was not surprised. He had never travelled in Ireland before, but he held a belief that time is very little accounted of west of the Shannon. He looked out of the window at the rain-swept platform. It seemed to him that every passenger except himself was leaving the train at Finnabeg. This did not surprise him much. There was only one more station, Dunadea, the terminus of the branch line on which Sir James was travelling. It lay fifteen miles further on, across a desolate stretch of bog. It was not to be supposed that many people wanted to go to Dunadea.

Sir James, looking out of his window, noticed that the passengers who alighted did not leave the station. They stood in groups on the platform and talked to each other. They took no notice of the rain, though it was very heavy. Now and then one or two of them came to Sir James' carriage

and peered in through the window. They seemed interested in him. A tall young priest stared at him for a long time. Two commercial travellers joined the priest and looked at Sir James. A number of women took the place of the priest and the commercial travellers when they went away. Finally, the guard, the engine driver, and the station master came and looked in through the window. They withdrew together and sat on a barrow at the far end of the platform. They lit their pipes and consulted together. The priest joined them and offered advice. Sir James became a little impatient.

Half an hour passed. The engine driver, the station master, and the guard knocked the ashes out of their pipes and walked over to Sir James' compartment. The guard opened the door.

"Is it Dunadea you're for, your honour?" he said.

"Yes," said Sir James. "When are you going on?"

The guard turned to the engine driver.

"It's what I'm after telling you," he said, "it's Dunadea the gentleman's for."

"It might be better for him," said the engine driver, "if he was to content himself with Finnabeg for this day at any rate."

"Do you hear that, your honour?" said the guard. "Michael here, says it would be better for you to stay in Finnabeg."

"There's a grand hotel, so there is," said the station master, "the same that's kept by Mrs. Mulcahy, "and devil the better you'll find between this and Dublin."

Sir James looked from one man to the other in astonishment. Nowadays the public is accustomed to large demands from railway workers, demands for higher wages and shorter hours. But Sir James had never before heard of an engine driver who tried to induce a passenger to get out of his train fifteen miles short of his destination.

"I insist," he said abruptly, "on your taking me on to Dunadea."

"It's what I told you all along, Michael," said the guard. "He's a mighty determined gentleman, so he is. I knew that the moment I set eyes on him."

The guard was perfectly right. Sir James was a man of most determined character. His career proved it. Before the war he had been professor of economics in a Scottish University, lecturing to a class of ten or twelve students for a salary of £250 a year. When peace came he was the head of a newly-created Ministry of Strikes, controlling a staff of a thousand or twelve hundred men and women, drawing a salary of £2,500 a year. Only a man of immense determination can achieve such results. He had garnered in a knighthood as he advanced. It was the reward of signal service to the

State when he held the position of Chief Controller of Information and Statistics.

"Let him not be saying afterwards that he didn't get a proper warning," said the engine driver.

He walked towards his engine as he spoke. The guard and the station master followed him.

"I suppose now, Michael," said the guard, "that you'll not be wanting me."

"I will not," said the engine driver. "The train will do nicely without you for as far as I'm going to take her."

Sir James did not hear either the guard's question or the driver's answer. He did hear, with great satisfaction, what the station master said next.

"Are you right there now?" the man shouted, "for if you are it's time you were starting."

He unrolled a green flag and waved it. He blew a shrill blast on his whistle. The driver stepped into the cab of the engine and handled his levers. The train started.

Sir James leaned back in the corner of his compartment and smiled. The track over which he travelled was badly laid and the train advanced by jerks and bumps. But the motion was pleasant to Sir James. Any forward movement of that train would have been pleasant to him. Each bump and jerk brought him a little nearer to Dunaedea and therefore a little nearer to Miss Molly

Dennison. Sir James was very heartily in love with a girl who seemed to him to be the most beautiful and the most charming in the whole world. Next day, such was his good fortune, he was to marry her. Under the circumstances a much weaker man than Sir James would have withstood the engine driver and resisted the invitation of Mrs. Mulcahy's hotel in Finnabeg. Under the circumstances even an intellectual man of the professor type was liable to pleasant day dreams.

Sir James' thoughts went back to the day, six months before, when he had first seen Miss Molly Dennison. She had been recommended to him by a friend as a young lady likely to make an efficient private secretary. Sir James, who had just become Head of the Ministry of Strikes, wanted a private secretary. He appointed Miss Dennison, and saw her for the first time when she presented herself in his office. At that moment his affection was born. It grew and strengthened day by day. Miss Molly's complexion was the radiant product of the soft, wet, winds of Connaught, which had blown on her since her birth. Not even four years' work in Government offices in London had dulled her cheeks. Her smile had the fresh innocence of a child's and she possessed a curious felicity of manner which was delightful though a little puzzling. Her

view of strikes and the important work of the Ministry was fresh and quite unconventional. Sir James, who had all his life moved among serious and earnest people, found Miss Molly's easy cheerfulness very fascinating. Even portentous words like syndicalism, which rang in other people's ears like the passing bells of our social order, moved her to airy laughter. There were those, oldish men and slightly less oldish women, who called her flippant. Sir James offered her his hand, his heart, his title, and a share of his £2,500 a year. Miss Molly accepted all four, resigned her secretaryship and went home to her father's house in Dunadea to prepare her trousseau.

The train stopped abruptly. But even the bump and the ceasing of noise did not fully arouse Sir James from his pleasant dreams. He looked out of the window and satisfied himself that he had not reached Dunadea station or indeed any other station. The rain ran down the window glass, obscuring his view of the landscape. He was dimly aware of a wide stretch of grey-brown bog, of drifting grey clouds and of a single white-washed cottage near the railway line. He lit a cigarette and lay back again. Molly's face floated before his eyes. The sound of Molly's voice was fresh in his memory. He thought of the next day and the return journey across the bog with Molly by his side.

At the end of half an hour he awoke to the fact that the train was still at rest. He looked out again and saw nothing except the rain, the bog, and the cottage. This time he opened the window and put out his head. He looked up the line and down it. There was no one to be seen.

"The signals," thought Sir James, "must be against us."

He looked again, first out of one window, then out of the other. There was no signal in sight. The single line of railway ran unbroken across the bog, behind the train and in front of it. Sir James, puzzled, and a little wet, drew back into his compartment and shut the window. He waited, with rapidly growing impatience, for another half hour. Nothing happened. Then he saw a man come out of the cottage near the line. He was carrying a basket in one hand and a tea-pot in the other. He approached the train. He came straight to Sir James' compartment and opened the door. Sir James recognised the engine driver.

"I was thinking," said the man, "that maybe your honour would be glad of a cup of tea and a bit of bread. I am sorry there is no butter, but, sure, butter is hard to come by these times."

He laid the teapot on the floor and put the basket on the seat in front of Sir James. He unpacked it, taking out a loaf of home

made bread, a teacup, a small bottle of milk, and a paper full of sugar.

"It's not much to be offering a gentleman like yourself," he said, "but it's the best we have, and seeing that you'll be here all night and best part of to-morrow you'll be wanting something to eat."

Sir James gasped with astonishment.

"Here all night!" he said. "Why should we be here all night? Has the engine broken down?"

"It has not," said the driver.

"Then you must go on," said Sir James. "I insist on your going on at once."

The driver poured out a cup of tea and handed it to Sir James. Then he sat down and began to talk in a friendly way.

"Sure, I can't go on," he said, "when I'm out on strike."

Sir James was so startled that he upset a good deal of tea. As Head of the Ministry of Strikes he naturally had great experience, but he had never before heard of a solitary engine driver going on strike in the middle of a bog.

"The way of it is this," the driver went on. "It was giv out, by them that does be managing things that there was to be a general strike on the first of next month. You might have heard of that, for it was in all the papers."

Sir James had heard of it. It was the

subject of many notes and reports in his Ministry.

"But this isn't the 1st of next month," he said.

"It is not," said the driver. "It's no more than the 15th of this month. But the way I'm placed at present, it wouldn't be near so convenient to me to be striking next month as it is to be striking now. There's talk of moving me off this line and putting me on to the engine that does be running into Athlone with the night mail; and it's to-morrow the change is to be made. Now I needn't tell you that Athlone's a mighty long way from where we are this minute."

He paused and looked at Sir James with an intelligent smile.

"My wife lives in the little house beyond there," he said pointing out of the window to the cottage. "And what I said to myself was this: If I am to be striking—which I've no great wish to do—but if it must be—and seemingly it must—I may as well do it in the convenientest place I can; for as long as a man strikes the way he's told, there can't be a word said to him; and any way the 1st of next month or the 15th of this month, what's the differ? Isn't one day as good as another?"

He evidently felt that his explanation was sufficient and satisfactory. He rose to his feet and opened the door of the compartment.

"I'm sorry now," he said, "if I'm causing any inconvenience to a gentleman like yourself. But what can I do? I offered to leave you behind at Finnabeg, but you wouldn't stay. Any way the night's warm and if you stretch yourself on the seat there you won't know it till morning, and then I'll bring you over another cup of tea so as you won't be hungry. It's a twenty-four hour strike, so it is; and I won't be moving on out of this before two o'clock or may be half past. But what odds? The kind of place Dunadea is, a day or two doesn't matter one way or another, and if it was the day after to-morrow in place of to-morrow you got there it would be the same thing in the latter end."

He climbed out of the compartment as he spoke and stumped back through the rain to his cottage. Sir James was left wondering how the people of Dunadea managed to conduct the business of life when one day was the same to them as another and the loss of a day now and then did not matter. He was quite certain that the loss of a day mattered a great deal to him, his position being what it was. He wondered what Miss Molly Dennison would think when he failed to appear at her father's house that evening for dinner; what she would think—the speculation nearly drove him mad—when he did not appear in the church next day. He put on an overcoat, took an umbrella

and set off for the engine driver's cottage. He had to climb down a steep embankment and then cross a wire fence. He found it impossible to keep his umbrella up, which distressed him, for he was totally unaccustomed to getting wet.

He found the driver, who seemed to be a good and domesticated man, sitting at his fireside with a baby on his knee. His wife was washing clothes in a corner of the kitchen.

"Excuse me," said Sir James, "but my business in Dunadea is very important. There will be serious trouble if—"

"There's no use asking me to go on with the train," said the driver, "for I can't do it. I'd never hear the last of it if I was to be a blackleg."

The woman at the wash tub looked up.

"Don't be talking that way, Michael," she said, "let you get up and take the gentleman along to where he wants to go."

"I will not," said the driver, "I'd do it if I could but I won't have it said that I was the one to break the strike."

It was very much to the credit of Sir James that he recognised the correctness of the engine driver's position. It is not pleasant to be held up twenty-four hours in the middle of a bog. It is most unpleasant to be kept away from church on one's own wedding day. But Sir James knew that strikes are

sacred things, far more sacred than weddings. He hastened to agree with the engine driver.

"I know you can't go on," he said, "Nothing would induce me to ask you such a thing. But perhaps—"

The woman at the wash tub did not reverence strikes or understand the labour movement. She spoke abruptly.

"Have sense the two of you," she said, "What's to hinder you taking the gentleman into Dunadea, Michael?"

"It's what I can't do nor won't," said her husband.

"I'm not asking you to," said Sir James, "I understand strikes thoroughly and I know you can't do it. All I came here for was to ask you to tell me where I could find a telegraph office."

"There's no telegraphic office nearer than Dunadea," said the engine driver, "and that's seven miles along the railway and maybe nine if you go round by road."

Sir James looked out at the rain. It was thick and persistent. A strong west wind swept it in sheets across the bog. He was a man of strong will and great intellectual power; but he doubted if he could walk even seven miles along the sleepers of a railway line against half a gale of wind, wearing on his feet a pair of patent leather boots bought for a wedding.

"Get up out of that Michael," said the

woman, "And off with you to Dunadea with the gentleman's telegram. You'll break no strike by doing that, so not another word out of your head."

"I'll—I'll give you ten shillings with pleasure," said Sir James, "I'll give you a pound if you'll take a message for me to Mr. Dennison's house."

"Anything your honour chooses to give," said the woman, "will be welcome, for we are poor people. But it's my opinion that Michael ought to do it for nothing seeing it's him and his old strike that has things the way they are."

"To listen to you talking," said the driver, "anybody would think I'd made the strike myself; which isn't true at all, for there's not a man in the country that wants it less than me."

Sir James tore a leaf from his note book and wrote a hurried letter to Miss Dennison. The engine driver tucked it into the breast pocket of his coat and trudged away through the rain. His wife invited Sir James to sit by the fire. He did so gladly, taking the stool her husband had left. He even, after a short time, found that he had taken the child on to his knee. It was a persistent child, which clung round his legs and stared at him till he took it up. The woman went on with her washing.

"What," said Sir James, "is the immediate

cause of this strike?"

"Cause!" she said. "There's no cause, only foolishness. If it was more wages they were after I would say there was some sense in it. Or if it was less work they wanted you could understand it—though it's more work and not less the most of the men in this country should be doing. But the strike that's in it now isn't what you might call a strike at all. It's a demonstration, so it is. That's what they're saying any way. It's a demonstration in favour of the Irish Republic, which some of them play-boys is after getting up in Dublin. The Lord save us, would nothing do them only a republic?"

Two hours later Sir James went back to his railway carriage. He had listened with interest to the opinions of the engine driver's wife on politics and the Labour Movement. He was convinced that a separate and independent Ministry of Strikes ought to be established in Dublin. His own office was plainly incapable of dealing with Irish conditions. He took from his bag a quantity of foolscap paper and set to work to draft a note to the Prime Minister on the needs and ideas of Irish Labour. He became deeply interested in his work and did not notice the passing time.

He was aroused by the appearance of Miss Molly Dennison at the door of his carriage. Her hair, which was blown about her face,

was exceedingly wet. The water dripped from her skirt and the sleeves of her jacket. Her complexion was as radiant and her smile as brilliant as ever.

"Hullo, Jimmy," she said. "What a frowst! Fancy sitting in that poky little carriage with both windows shut. Get up and put away your silly old papers. If you come along at once we'll just be in time for dinner."

"How did you get here," said Sir James. "I never thought—. In this weather—. How *did* you get here?"

"On my bike, of course," said Molly. "Did a regular sprint. Wind behind me. Going like blazes. I'd have done it in forty minutes, only Michael ran into a sheep and I had to wait for him."

Sir James was aware that the engine driver, grinning broadly, was on the step of the carriage behind Molly.

"I lent Michael Dad's old bike," said Molly, "and, barring the accident with the sheep, he came along very well."

"What I'm thinking," said the driver, "is that you'll never be able to fetch back against the wind that does be in it. I wouldn't say but you might do it, miss; but the gentleman wouldn't be fit. He's not accustomed to the like."

"We're not going to ride back," said Molly. "You're going to take us back on the engine,

with the two bikes in the tender, on top of the coal."

"I can't do it miss," said the driver. "I declare to God I'd be afraid of my life to do it. Didn't I tell you I was out on strike?"

"We oughtn't to ask him," said Sir James. "Surely, Molly, you must understand that. It would be an act of gross disloyalty on his part, disloyalty to his union, to the cause of labour. And any effort we make to persuade him—. My dear Molly, the right of collective bargaining which lies at the root of all strikes—"

Molly ignored Sir James and turned to the engine driver.

"Just you wait here five minutes," she said, "till I get some one who knows how to talk to you."

She jumped out of the carriage and ran down the railway embankment. Sir James and the engine driver watched her anxiously. "I wouldn't wonder," said Michael, "but it might be my wife she's after."

He was quite right. Five minutes later, Molly and the engine driver's wife were climbing the embankment together.

"I don't see," said Sir James, "what your wife has to do with the matter."

"By this time to-morrow," said Michael, "you will see; if so be you're married by then, which is what Miss Molly said you will be."

His wife, with Molly after her, climbed into the carriage.

"Michael," she said, "did the young lady tell you she's to be married to-morrow?"

"She did tell me," he said, "and I'm sorry for her. But what can I do? If I was to take that engine into Dunadea they'd call me a blackleg the longest day ever I lived."

"I'll call you something a mighty deal worse if you don't," said his wife. "You and your strikes! Strikes, Moyah! And a young lady wanting to be married!"

Michael turned apologetically to Sir James.

"Women does be terrible set on weddings," he said, "and that's a fact."

"That'll do now, Michael," said Molly, "Stop talking and put the two bikes on the tender, and poke up your old fires or what ever it is you do to make your engine go."

"Molly," said Sir James, when Michael and his wife had left the carriage, "I've drawn up a note for the Prime Minister advising the establishment of a special Ministry of Strikes for Ireland. I feel that the conditions in this country are so peculiar that our London office cannot deal with them. I think perhaps I'd better suggest that he should put you at the head of the new office."

"Your visit to Ireland is doing you good already," said Molly. "You're developing a sense of humour."

III

THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE

DR. FARELLY, Medical Officer of Dunailin, volunteered for service with the R.A.M.C. at the beginning of the war. He had made no particular boast of patriotism. He did not even profess to be keenly interested in his profession or anxious for wider experience. He said, telling the simple truth, that life at Dunailin was unutterably dull, and that he welcomed war—would have welcomed worse things—for the sake of escaping a monotony which was becoming intolerable.

The army authorities accepted Dr. Farelly. The local Board of Guardians, which paid him a salary of £200 a year, agreed to let him go on the condition that he provided a duly qualified substitute to do his work while he was away. There a difficulty faced Dr. Farelly. Duly qualified medical men, willing to take up temporary jobs, are not plentiful in war-time. And the job he had to offer —Dr. Farelly was painfully conscious of the fact—was not a very attractive one.

Dunailin is a small town in Western Connaught, seven miles from the nearest railway

station. It possesses a single street, straggling and very dirty, a police barrack, a chapel, which seems disproportionately large, and seven shops. One of the shops is also the post office. Another belongs to John Conerney, the butcher. The remaining five are public houses, doing their chief business in whisky and porter, but selling, as side lines, farm seeds, spades, rakes, hoes, stockings, hats, blouses, ribbons, flannelette, mens' suits, tobacco, sugar, tea, postcards, and sixpenny novels. The chief inhabitants of the town are the priest, a benevolent but elderly man, who lives in the presbytery next the large chapel; Sergeant Rahilly, who commands the six members of the Royal Irish Constabulary and lives in the barrack; and Mr. Timothy Flanagan, who keeps the largest shop in the town and does a bigger business than anyone else in porter and whisky.

Dr. Farelly, standing on his doorstep with his pipe in his mouth, looked up and down the street. He was more than ever convinced that it might be very difficult to get a doctor to go to Dunailin, and still harder to get one to stay. The town lay, to all appearance, asleep under the blaze of the noonday August sun. John Conerney's greyhounds, five of them, were stretched in the middle of the street, confident that they would be undisturbed. Sergeant Rahilly sunned himself on a bench outside

the barrack door, and Mr. Flanagan sat in a room behind his shop nodding over the ledger in which his customers' debts were entered. Dr. Farelly sighed. He had advertised for a doctor to take his place in all the likeliest papers, and had not been rewarded by a single answer. He was beginning to think that he must either resign his position at Dunailin or give up the idea of war service.

At half-past twelve the town stirred in its sleep and partially awoke. Paddy Doolan, who drove the mail car, arrived from Derrymore. Dr. Farelly strolled down to the post office, seeking, but scarcely hoping for, a letter in reply to his advertisements. He was surprised and very greatly pleased when the post-mistress handed him a large envelope, fat and bulging, bearing a Manchester postmark. The moment he opened it Dr. Farelly knew that he had got what he wanted, an application for the post he had to offer. He took out, one after another, six sheets of nicely-printed matter. These were testimonials signed by professors, tutors, surgeons, and doctors, all eloquent about the knowledge, skill, and personal integrity of one Theophilus Lovaway. Dr. Farelly stuffed these into his pocket. He had often written testimonials himself—in Ireland everyone writes them in scores—and he knew precisely what they were worth. He came at last to a letter, very neatly typewritten. It began formally :

"DEAR SIR—I beg to offer myself as a candidate for the post of medical officer, temporary, for the town and district of Dunailin, on the terms of your advertisement in *The British Medical Journal*."

Dr. Farelly, like the Etruscans in Macaulay's poem, "could scarce forbear to cheer." He walked jauntily back to his house, relit his pipe and sat down to read the rest of the letter.

Theophilus Lovaway was apparently a garrulous person. He had covered four sheets with close typescript. He began by stating that he was only just qualified and had never practised anywhere. He hoped that Dr. Farelly would not consider his want of experience a disqualification. Dr. Farelly did not care in the least. If Theophilus Lovaway was legally qualified to write prescriptions, nothing else mattered. The next three paragraphs of the letter—and they were all long—described, in detail, the condition of Lovaway's health. He suffered it appeared, from a disordered heart, weak lungs, and dyspepsia. But for these misfortunes, the letter went on, Theophilus would have devoted himself to the services of his country in her great need. Dr. Farelly sniffed. He had a prejudice against people who wrote or talked in that way. He began to feel less cheerful. Theophilus might come to Dunailin. It was very doubtful whether

he would stay there long, his lungs, heart, and stomach being what they were.

The last half of the letter was painfully disconcerting. Two whole pages were devoted to an explanation of the writer's wish to spend some time in the west of Ireland. Theophilus Lovaway had managed, in the middle of his professional reading, to study the literature of the Irish Renaissance. He had fallen deeply in love with the spirit of the Celtic peasantry. He described at some length what he thought that spirit was. "Tuned to the spiritual" was one of the phrases he used. "Desire-compelling, with the elusiveness of the rainbow's end," was another. Dr. Farelly grew despondent. If Theophilus expected life in Dunailin to be in the least like one of Mr. Yeats's plays he was doomed to a bitter disappointment and would probably leave the place in three weeks.

But Dr. Farelly was not going to give up hope without a struggle. He put the letter in his pocket and walked across the road to Timothy Flanagan's shop.

"Flanagan," he said, "I've got a man to take on my job here."

"I'm glad to hear it, doctor," said Flanagan. "It would be a pity now if something was to interfere with you, and you wanting to be off massacring the Germans. If the half of what's in the papers is true, its massacring

or worse them fellows want."

"The trouble is," said Dr. Farelly, "that the man I've got may not stay."

"Why wouldn't he stay? Isn't Dunailin as good a place to be in as any other? Any sensible man——"

"That's just it," said Dr. Farelly. "I'm not at all sure that this is a sensible man. Just listen to this."

He read aloud the greater part of the letter.

"Now what do you think of the man who wrote that?" he asked; "what kind of fellow would you say he was?"

"I'd say," said Flanagan, "that he's a simple, innocent kind of man; but I wouldn't say there was any great harm in him."

"I'm very much afraid," said Dr. Farelly, "that he's too simple and innocent. That's the first thing I have against him. Look here now, Flanagan, if you or anyone else starts filling this young fellow up with whisky—it will be an easy enough thing to do, and I don't deny that it'll be a temptation. But if you do it you'll have his mother or his aunt or someone over here to fetch him home again. That's evidently the kind of man he is. And if I lose him I'm done, for I'll never get anyone else."

"Make your mind easy about that, doctor. Devil the drop of whisky he'll get out of my shop while he's here, and I'll take care no other one will let him have a bottle. If he

drinks at all it'll be the stuff he brings with him in his own portmanteau."

"Good," said Dr. Farelly, "I'll trust you about that. The next point is his health. You heard what he said about his heart and his lungs and his stomach."

"He might die on us," said Flanagan, "and that's a fact."

"Oh, he'll not die. That sort of man never does die, not till he's about ninety, anyhow. But it won't do to let him fancy this place doesn't agree with him. What you've got to do is to see that he gets a proper supply of good, wholesome food, eggs and milk, and all the rest of it."

"If there's an egg in the town he'll get it," said Flanagan, "and I'll speak to Johnny Conerney about the meat that's supplied to him. You may trust me, doctor, if that young fellow dies in Dunailin it'll not be for want of food."

"Thanks," said Dr. Farelly; "and keep him cheerful, Flanagan, don't let him mope. That brings me to the third point. You heard what he wrote about the Irish Renaissance and the Celtic spirit?"

"I heard it right enough," said Flanagan, "but I'm not sure do I know the meaning of it."

"The meaning of it," said Dr. Farelly, "is fairies, just plain, ordinary fairies. That's what he wants, and I don't expect he'll settle

down contentedly unless he finds a few."

"Sure you know well enough, doctor, that there's no fairies in these parts. I don't say there mightn't have been some in times past, but any there was is gone now."

"I know that," said Dr. Farelly, "and I'm not asking you to go beating thorn bushes in the hopes of catching one. But if this fellow, Theophilus Lovaway—did ever you hear such a name?—if he wants fairies he must hear about them. You'll have to get hold of a few people who go in for that sort of thing. Now what about Patsy Doolan's mother? She's old enough, and she looks like a witch herself."

"If the like of the talk of Patsy Doolan's mother would be giving him is any use I'll see he's satisfied. That old woman would talk the hind leg off a donkey about fairies or anything else if you were to give her a pint of porter, and I'll do that. I'll give it to her regular, so I will. I'd do more than that for you, doctor, for you're a man I like, let alone that you're going out to foreign parts to put the fear of God into them Germans, which is no more than they deserve."

Dr. Farelly felt satisfied that Mr. Flanagan would do his best for Lovaway. And Mr. Flanagan was an important person. As the principal publican in the town, the chairman of all the councils, boards, and leagues there were, he had an enormous amount of influence.

But Dr. Farelly was still a little uneasy. He went over to the police barrack and explained the situation to Sergeant Rahilly. The sergeant readily promised to do all he could to make Dunailin pleasant for the new doctor, and to keep him from getting into mischief or trouble. Only in the matter of Lovaway's taste for Irish folk-lore and poetry the sergeant refused to promise any help. He was quite firm about this.

"It wouldn't do for the police to be mixed up in that kind of work," he said. "Politics are what a sergeant of police is bound to keep out of."

"But hang it all," said Dr. Farelly, "fairies aren't politics."

"They may or they may not be," said the sergeant. "But believe me, doctor, the men that talks about them things, fairies and all that, is the same men that's at the bottom of all the leagues in the country, and it wouldn't do for me to be countenancing them. But I'll tell you what I'll do for you now, doctor. If I can't get fairies for him I'll see that anything that's to be had in the district in the way of a fee for a lunatic or the like goes to the young fellow you're bringing here. I'll do that, and if there's more I can do you can reckon on me—barring fairies and politics of all kinds."

Mr. Flanagan and Sergeant Rahilly were trustworthy men. In a good cause they were

prompt and energetic. Flanagan warned the other publicans in the town that they must not supply the new doctor with any whisky. He spoke seriously to John Conerney the butcher.

"Good meat, now, Johnny. The best you have, next to what joints you might be supplying to the priest or myself. He has a delicate stomach, the man that's coming, and a bit of braxy mutton might be the death of him."

He spoke to Paddy Doolan and told him that his old mother would be wanted to attend on the new doctor and must be ready whenever she was called for.

"Any old ancient story she might know," he said, "about the rath beyond on the hill, or the way they shot the bailiff on the bog in the bad times, or about it's not being lucky to meet a red-haired woman in the morning, anything at all that would be suitable she'll be expected to tell. And if she does what she's bid there'll be a drop of porter for her in my house whenever she likes to call for it."

Sergeant Rahilly talked in a serious but vague way to everyone he met about the importance of treating Dr. Lovaway well, and the trouble which would follow any attempt to rob or ill-use him.

Before Dr. Lovaway arrived his reputation was established in Dunailin. It was gener-

ally believed that he was a dipsomaniac, sent to the west of Ireland to be cured. It was said that he was very rich and had already ordered huge quantities of meat from Johnny Conerney. He was certainly of unsound mind: Mr. Flanagan's hints about fairies settled that point. He was also a man of immense influence in Government circles, perhaps a near relation of the Lord-Lieutenant: Sergeant Rahilly's way of speaking convinced everyone of that. The people were, naturally, greatly interested in their new doctor, and were prepared to give him a hearty welcome.

His arrival was a little disappointing. He drove from the station at Derrymore on Paddy Doolan's car, and had only a small portmanteau with him. He was expected to come in a motor of his own with a van-load of furniture behind him. His appearance was also disappointing. He was a young man. He looked so very young that a stranger might have guessed his age at eighteen. He wore large, round spectacles, and had pink, chubby cheeks. In one respect only did he come up to popular expectation. He was plainly a young man of feeble intellect, for he allowed Paddy Doolan to overcharge him in the grossest way.

"Thanks be to God," said Sergeant Rahilly to Mr. Flanagan, "it's seldom anyone's

sick in this place. I wouldn't like to be trusting the likes of that young fellow very far. But what odds? We've got to do the best we can for him, and my family's healthy, anyway."

Fate has a nasty trick of hitting us just where we feel most secure. The sergeant himself was a healthy man. His wife did not know what it was to be ill. Molly, his twelve-year old daughter, was as sturdy a child as any in the town. But Molly had an active mind and an enterprising character. On the afternoon of Doctor Lovaway's arrival, her mother, father, and most other people being fully occupied, she made her way round the back of the village, climbed the wall of the doctor's garden and established herself in an apple tree. She took six other children with her. There was an abundant crop of apples, but they were not nearly ripe. Molly ate until she could eat no more. The other children, all of them younger than Molly, stuffed themselves joyfully with the hard green fruit.

At eight o'clock that evening Molly complained of pains. Her mother put her to bed. At half-past eight Molly's pains were considerably worse and she began to shriek. Mrs. Rahilly, a good deal agitated by the violence of the child's yells, told the Sergeant to go for the doctor. Sergeant Rahilly laid down his newspaper and his pipe. He went

slowly down the street towards the doctor's house. He was surprised to hear shrieks, not unlike Molly's, in various houses as he passed. Mrs. Conerney, the butcher's wife, rushed out of her door and told the sergeant that her little boy, a child of nine, was dying in frightful agony.

Mr. Flanagan was standing at the door of his shop. He beckoned to the sergeant.

"It's lucky," he said, "things happening the way they have on the very first night of the new doctor being here."

"I don't know so much about luck," said Sergeant Rahilly. "What luck?"

"The half of the children in the town is took with it," said Flanagan.

"You may call that luck if it pleases you," said the sergeant. "But it's not my notion of luck. My own Molly's bellowing like a young heifer, and Mrs. Conerney's boy is dying, so she tells me. If that's luck I'd rather you had it than me."

"I'm sorry for the childer," said Flanagan; "but Mrs. Doolan, who's in the shop this minute drinking porter, says it'll do them no harm if they're given a sup of water to drink out of the Holy Well beyond Tubber Neeve, and a handful of rowan berries laid on the stomach or wherever else the pain might be."

"Rowan berries be damned," said the sergeant. "I'm off for the doctor; not

that I'm expecting much from him. A young fellow with a face like that! I wish to God Dr. Farelly was back with us."

"Doctors is no use," said Flanagan, "neither one nor another, if it's true what Mrs. Doolan says."

"And what does Mrs. Doolan say?" asked the sergeant.

"I'm not saying I believe her," said Flanagan, "and I'm not asking you to believe her, but what she says is——"

He whispered in the sergeant's ear. The sergeant looked at him bewildered.

"Them ones?" he said, "them ones? Now what might you and Mrs. Doolan be meaning by that, Timothy Flanagan?"

"Just fairies," said Flanagan. "Mind you, I'm not saying I believe it."

"Fairies be damned," said the sergeant.

"They may be," said Flanagan. "I'm not much of a one for fairies myself; but you'll not deny, sergeant, that it looks queer, all the children being took the same way at the same time. Anyhow, whether you believe what Mrs. Doolan says or not——"

"I do not believe it," said the sergeant. "Not a word of it."

"You needn't," said Flanagan, "I don't myself. All I say is that it's lucky a thing of the sort happening the very first evening the new doctor's in the place. It's fairies he's after, remember that. It's look-

ing for fairies that brought him here. Didn't Dr. Farelly tell me so himself and tell you? Wasn't Dr. Farelly afeard he wouldn't stay on account of fairies being scarce about these parts this long time? And now the place is full of them—according to what Mrs. Doolan says."

Sergeant Rahilly heard, or fancied he heard, a particularly loud shriek from Molly. He certainly heard the wailing of Mrs. Conerney and the agitated cries of several other women. He turned from Flanagan without speaking another word and walked straight to the doctor's house.

Five minutes later Dr. Lovaway, hatless and wearing a pair of slippers on his feet, was running up the street towards the barrack. His first case, a serious one, calling for instant attention, had come to him unexpectedly. Opposite Flanagan's shop he was stopped by Mrs. Doolan. She laid a skinny, wrinkled, and very dirty hand on his arm. Her shawl fell back from her head, showing a few thin wisps of grey hair. Her eyes were bleary and red-rimmed, her breath reeked of porter.

"Arrah, doctor dear," she said, "I'm glad to see you, so I am. Isn't it a grand thing now that a fine young man like you would be wanting to sit down and be talking to an old woman like myself, that might be your mother—no, but your grandmother?"

Dr. Lovaway, desperately anxious to reach the sergeant's suffering child, tried to shake off the old woman. He suspected that she was drunk. He was certain that she was extremely unpleasant. The suggestion that she might be his mother filled him with loathing. It was not any pleasanter to think of her as a grandmother. Mrs. Doolan clung tightly to his arm with both her skinny hands.

Mr. Flanagan approached them from behind; leaning across Lovaway's shoulders, he whispered in his ear:

"There's not about the place—there's not within the four seas of Ireland, one that has as much knowledge of fairies and all belonging to them as that old woman."

"Fairies!" said Lovaway. "Did you say——? Surely you didn't say fairies?"

"I just thought you'd be pleased," said Flanagan, "and it's lucky, so it is, that Mrs. Doolan should happen to be in the town to-night of all nights, just when them ones—the fairies, you know, doctor—has half the children in the town took with pains in their stomachs."

Dr. Lovaway looked round him wildly. He supposed that Flanagan must be mad. He had no doubt that the old woman was drunk.

"I've seen the like before," she said, leering up into Lovaway's face. "I've seen worse. I've seen a strong man tying himself

into knots with the way they had him held, and there's no cure for it only—— "

Lovaway caught sight of Sergeant Rahilly. In his first rush to reach the stricken child he had left the sergeant behind. The sergeant was a heavy man who moved with dignity.

"Take this woman away," said Lovaway. "Don't let her hold me."

"Doctor, darling," whined Mrs. Doolan, "don't be saying the like of that."

"Biddy Doolan," said the sergeant, sternly, "will you let go of the doctor? I'd be sorry to arrest you, so I would, but arrested you'll be if you don't get along home out of that and keep quiet."

Mrs. Doolan loosed her hold on the doctor's arm, but she did not go home. She followed Lovaway up the street, moving, for so old a woman, at a surprising pace.

"Doctor, dear," she said, "don't be giving medicine to them childer. Don't do it now. You'll only anger them that's done it, and it's a terrible thing when them ones is angry."

"Get away home out of that, Biddy Doolan," said the sergeant.

"Don't be hard on an old woman, now, sergeant," said Mrs. Doolan. "It's for your own good and the good of your child I'm speaking. Doctor, dear, there's no cure but the one. A cup of water from the well

of Tubber Neeve, the same to be drawn up in a new tin can that never was used. Let the child or the man, or it might be the cow, or whatever it is, let it drink that, a cup at a time, and let you——"

Lovaway, followed by the sergeant, entered the barrack. He needed no guiding to the room in which Molly lay. Her shrieks would have led a blind man to her bedside.

Mrs. Doolan was stopped at the door by a burly constable. She shouted her last advice to the doctor as he climbed the stairs.

"Let you take a handful of rowan berries and lay them on the stomach or wherever the pain might be, and if you wrap them in a yellow cloth it will be better; but they'll work well enough without that, only not so quick."

Driven off by the constable Mrs. Doolan went back to Flanagan's shop. She was quite calm and did not any longer appear to be the worse for the porter she had drunk.

"You'll give me another sup, now, Mr. Flanagan," she said. "It's well I deserve it. It's terrible dry work talking to a man like that one who won't listen to a word you're saying."

Flanagan filled a large tumbler with porter and handed it to her.

"Tell me this now, Mrs. Doolan," he said.

"What's the matter with Molly Rahilly and the rest of them?"

"It's green apples," said Mrs. Doolan, "green apples that they ate in the doctor's garden. Didn't I see the little lady sitting in the tree and the rest of the childer with her?"

Dr. Lovaway made a somewhat similar diagnosis. He spent several busy hours going in and out of the houses where the sufferers lay. It was not till a quarter past eleven that he returned to his home and the town settled down for the night. At half-past eleven—long after the legal closing hour—Sergeant Rahilly was sitting with Mr. Flanagan in the room behind the shop. A bottle of whisky and a jug of water were on the table in front of them.

"It's a queer thing now about that doctor," said Flanagan. "After what Dr. Farelly said to me I made dead sure he'd be pleased to find fairies about the place. But he was not. When I told him it was fairies he looked like a man that wanted to curse and didn't rightly know how. But sure the English is all queer, and the time you'd think you have them pleased is the very time they'd be most vexed with you."

IV

A LUNATIC AT LARGE

IT was Tuesday, a Tuesday early in October. Dr. Lovaway finished his breakfast quietly, conscious that he had a long morning before him and nothing particular to do. Tuesday is a quiet day in Dunailin; Wednesday is market day and people are busy, the doctor as well as everybody else. Young women who come into town with butter to sell take the opportunity of having their babies vaccinated on Wednesday. Old women, with baskets on their arms, find it convenient on that day to ask the doctor for something to rub into knee-joints where rheumatic pains are troublesome. Old men, who have ridden into town on their donkeys, consult the doctor about chronic coughs, and seek bottles likely to relieve "an impression on the chest."

Fridays, when the Petty Sessions' Court sits, are almost as busy. Mr. Timothy Flanagan, a magistrate in virtue of the fact that he is Chairman of the Urban District Council, administers justice of a rude and uncertain kind in the Court House. While

angry litigants are settling their business there, and repentant drunkards are paying the moderate fines imposed on them, their wives ask the doctor for advice about the treatment of whooping cough or the best way of treating a child which has incautiously stepped into a fire. Fair days, which occur once a month, are the busiest days of all. Everyone is in town on fair days, and every kind of ailment is brought to the doctor. Towards evening he has to put stitches into one or two cut scalps and sometimes set a broken limb. On Mondays and Thursdays the doctor sits in his office for an hour or two to register births and deaths.

But Tuesdays, unless a fair happens to fall on Tuesday, are quiet days. On this particular Tuesday Dr. Lovaway was pleasantly aware that he had nothing whatever to do and might count on having the whole day to himself. It was raining very heavily, but the weather did not trouble him at all. He had a plan for the day which rain could not mar.

He sat down at his writing table, took from a drawer a bundle of foolscap paper, fitted a new nib to his pen and filled his ink bottle. He began to write.

"A Study of the Remarkable Increase of Lunacy in Rural Connaught."

The title looked well. It would, he felt,

certainly attract the attention of the editor of *The British Medical Journal.*

But Dr. Lovaway did not like it. It was not for the editor of *The British Medical Journal,* or indeed, for a scientific public that he wanted to write. He started fresh on a new sheet of paper.

"Lunacy in the West of Ireland: Its Cause and Cure."

That struck him as the kind of title which would appeal to a philanthropist out to effect a social reform of some kind. But Dr. Lovaway was not satisfied with it. He respected reformers and was convinced of the value of their work, but his real wish was to write something of a literary kind. With prodigal extravagance he tore up another whole sheet of foolscap and began again.

"The Passing of the Gael. Ireland's Crowded Madhouses."

He purred a little over that title and then began the article itself. What he wanted to say was clear in his mind. He had been three weeks in Dunailin and he had spent more time over lunatics than anything else. Almost every day he found himself called upon by Sergeant Rahilly to "certify" a lunatic, to commit some unfortunate person with diseased intellect to an asylum. Sometimes he signed the required document. Often he hesitated, although he was always

supplied by the sergeant and his constables with a wealth of lurid detail about the dangerous and homicidal tendencies of the patient. Dr. Lovaway was profoundly impressed.

He gave his whole mind to the consideration of the problem which pressed on him. He balanced theories. He blamed tea, intermarriage, potatoes, bad whisky, religious enthusiasm, and did not find any of them nor all of them together satisfactory as explanations of the awful facts. He fell back finally on a theory of race decadence. Already fine phrases were forming themselves in his mind: "The inexpressible beauty of autumnal decay." "The exquisiteness of the decadent efflorescence of a passing race."

He covered a sheet of foolscap with a bare—he called it a detached—statement of the facts about Irish lunacy. He had just begun to recount his own experience when there was a knock at the door. The housekeeper, a legacy from Dr. Farelly, came in to tell him that Constable Malone wished to speak to him. Dr. Lovaway left his MS. with a sigh. He found Constable Malone, a tall man of magnificent physique, standing in the hall, the raindrops dripping from the cape he wore.

"The sergeant is after sending me round to you, sir," said Constable Malone, "to know would it be convenient for you to

attend at Ballygran any time this afternoon to certify a lunatic ? "

" Surely not another ! " said Dr. Lovaway.

" It was myself found him, sir," said the constable with an air of pride in his achievement. " The sergeant bid me say that he'd have Patsy Doolan's car engaged for you, and that him and me would go with you so that you wouldn't have any trouble more than the trouble of going to Ballygran, which is an out-of-the-way place sure enough, and it's a terrible day."

" Is the man violent ? " asked Dr. Lovaway.

By way of reply Constable Malone gave a short account of the man's position in life.

" He's some kind of a nephew of Mrs. Finnegan," he said, " and they call him Jimmy Finnegan, though Finnegan might not be his proper name. He does be helping Finnegan himself about the farm, and they say he's middling useful. But, of course, now the harvest's gathered, Finnegan will be able to do well enough without him till the spring."

This did not seem to Dr. Lovaway a sufficient reason for incarcerating Jimmy in an asylum.

" But is he violent ? " he repeated. " Is he dangerous to himself or others ? "

" He never was the same as other boys,"

said the constable, "and the way of it with fellows like that is what you wouldn't know. He might be quiet enough to-day and be slaughtering all before him to-morrow. And what Mrs. Finnegan says is that she'd be glad if you'd see the poor boy to-day because she's in dread of what he might do to-morrow night."

"To-morrow night! Why to-morrow night?"

"There's a change in the moon to-morrow," said the constable, "and they do say that the moon has terrible power over fellows that's took that way."

Dr. Lovaway, who was young and trained in scientific methods, was at first inclined to argue with Constable Malone about the effect of the moon on the human mind. He refrained, reflecting that it is an impious thing to destroy an innocent superstition. One of the great beauties of Celtic Ireland is that it still clings to faiths forsaken by the rest of the world.

At two o'clock that afternoon Dr. Lovaway took his seat on Patsy Doolan's car. It was still raining heavily. Dr. Lovaway wore an overcoat of his own, a garment which had offered excellent protection against rainy days in Manchester. In Dunailin, for a drive to Ballygran, the coat was plainly insufficient. Mr. Flanagan hurried from his shop with a large oilskin cape taken

from a peg in his men's outfitting department. Constable Malone, under orders from the sergeant, went to the priest's house and borrowed a waterproof rug. Johnny Conerney the butcher appeared at the last moment with a sou'wester which he put on the doctor's head and tied under his chin. It would not be the fault of the people of Dunailin, if Lovaway, with his weak lungs, "died on them."

Patsy Doolan did not contribute anything to the doctor's outfit, but displayed a care for his safety.

"Take a good grip now, doctor," he said. "Take a hold of the little rail there beside you. The mare might be a bit wild on account of the rain, and her only clipped yesterday, and the road to Ballygran is jolty in parts."

Sergeant Rahilly and Constable Malone sat on one side of the car, Dr. Lovaway was on the other. Patsy Doolan sat on the driver's seat. Even with that weight behind her the mare proved herself to be "a bit wild." She went through the village in a series of bounds, shied at everything she saw in the road, and did not settle down until the car turned into a rough track which led up through the mountains to Ballygran. Dr. Lovaway held on tight with both hands. Patsy Doolan, looking back over his left shoulder, spoke words of encouragement.

"It'll be a bit strange to you at first, so it will," he said. "But by the time you're six months in Dunailin we'll have you taught to sit a car, the same as it might be an armchair you were on."

Dr. Lovaway, clinging on for his life while the car bumped over boulders, did not believe that a car would ever become to him as an armchair.

Ballygran is a remote place, very difficult of access. At the bottom of a steep hill, a stream, which seemed a raging torrent to Dr. Lovaway, flowed across the road. The mare objected very strongly to wading through it. Farther on the track along which they drove became precipitous and more stony than ever. Another stream, scorning its properly appointed course, flowed down the road, rolling large stones with it. Patsy Doolan was obliged to get down and lead the mare. After persuading her to advance twenty yards or so he called for the help of the police. Sergeant Rahilly took the other side of the mare's head. Constable Malone pushed at the back of the car. Dr. Lovaway, uncomfortable and rather nervous, wanted to get down and wade too. But the sergeant would not hear of this.

"Let you sit still," he said. "The water's over the tops of my boots, so it is, and where's the use of you getting a wetting that might

be the death of you?"

"Is it much farther?" asked Lovaway.

The sergeant considered the matter.

"It might be a mile and a bit," he said, "from where we are this minute."

The mile was certainly an Irish mile, and Dr. Lovaway began to think that there were some things in England, miles for instance, which are better managed than they are in Ireland. "The bit" which followed the mile belonged to a system of measurement even more generous than Irish miles and acres.

"I suppose now," said the sergeant, "that the country you come from is a lot different from this."

He had taken his seat again on the car after leading the mare up the river. He spoke in a cheery, conversational tone. Dr. Lovaway thought of Manchester and the surrounding district, thought of trams, trains, and paved streets.

"It is different," he said, "very different indeed."

Ballygran appeared at last, dimly visible through the driving rain. It was a miserable-looking hovel, roofed with sodden thatch, surrounded by a sea of mud. A bare-footed woman stood in the doorway. She wore a tattered skirt and a bodice fastened across her breast with a brass safety-pin. Behind her stood a tall man in a soiled flannel

jacket and a pair of trousers which hung in a ragged fringe round his ankles.

"Come in," said Mrs. Finnegan, "come in the whole of yez. It's a terrible day, sergeant, and I wonder at you bringing the doctor out in the weather that does be it in. Michael"—she turned to her husband who stood behind her—"let Patsy Doolan be putting the mare into the shed, and let you be helping him. Come in now, doctor, and take an air of the fire. I'll wet a cup of tea for you, so I will."

Dr. Lovaway passed through a low door into the cottage. His eyes gradually became accustomed to the gloom inside and to the turf smoke which filled the room. In a corner, seated on a low stool, he saw a young man crouching over the fire.

"That's him," said Mrs. Finnegan. "That's the poor boy, doctor. The sergeant will have been telling you about him."

The boy rose from his stool at the sound of her voice.

"Speak to the gentleman now," said Mrs. Finnegan. "Speak to the doctor, Jimmy alannah, and tell him the way you are."

"Your honour's welcome," said Jimmy, in a thin, cracked voice. "Your honour's welcome surely, though I don't mind that ever I set eyes on you before."

"Whisht now, Jimmy," said the sergeant. "It's the doctor that's come to see you,

and it's for your own good he's come."

"I know that," said Jimmy, "and I know he'll be wanting to have me put away. Well, what must be, must be, if it's the will of God, and if it's before me it may as well be now as any other time."

"You see the way he is," said the sergeant. "And I have the papers here ready to be signed."

Dr. Lovaway saw, or believed he saw, exactly how things were. The boy was evidently of weak mind. There was little sign of actual lunacy, no sign at all of violence about him. Mrs. Finnegan added a voluble description of the case.

"It might be a whole day," she said, "and he wouldn't be speaking a word, nor he wouldn't seem to hear if you speak to him, and he'd just sit there by the fire the way you seen him without he'd be doing little turns about the place, feeding the pig, or mending a gap in the wall or the like. I will say for Jimmy, the poor boy's always willing to do the best he can."

"Don't be troubling the doctor now, Mrs. Finnegan," said the sergeant. "He knows the way it is with the boy without your telling him. Just let the doctor sign what has to be signed and get done with it. Aren't we wet enough as it is without standing here talking half the day?"

The mention of the wet condition of the

party roused Mrs. Finnegan to action. She hung a kettle from a blackened hook in the chimney and piled up turf on the fire. Jimmy was evidently quite intelligent enough to know how to boil water. He took the bellows, went down on his knees, and blew the fire diligently. Mrs. Finnegan spread a somewhat dirty tablecloth on a still dirtier table and laid out cups and saucers on it.

Dr. Lovaway was puzzled. The boy at the fire might be, probably was, mentally deficient. He was not a case for an asylum. He was certainly not likely to become violent or to do any harm either to himself or anyone else. It was not clear why Mrs. Finnegan, who seemed a kindly woman, should wish to have him shut up. It was very difficult to imagine any reason for the action of the police in the matter. Constable Malone had discovered the existence of the boy in this remote place. Sergeant Rahilly had taken a great deal of trouble in preparing papers for his committal to the asylum, and had driven out to Ballygran on a most inclement day. Dr. Lovaway wished he understood what was happening.

Finnegan, having left Patsy Doolan's mare, and apparently Patsy Doolan himself in the shed, came into the house.

Dr. Lovaway appealed to him.

"It doesn't seem to me," he said, "that this boy ought to be sent to an asylum.

I shall be glad to hear anything you have to tell me about him."

"Well now," said Mr. Finnegan, "he's a good, quiet kind of a boy, and if he hasn't too much sense there's many another has less."

"That's what I think," said Dr. Lovaway.

Jimmy stopped blowing the fire and looked round suddenly.

"Sure, I know well you're wanting to put me away," he said.

"It's for your own good," said the sergeant.

"It'll do him no harm anyway," said Finnegan, "if so be he's not kept there."

"Kept!" said the sergeant. "Is it likely now that they'd keep a boy like Jimmy? He'll be out again as soon as ever he's in. I'd say now a fortnight is the longest he'll be there."

"I wouldn't like," said Finnegan, "that he'd be kept too long. I'll be wanting him for spring work, but I'm willing to spare him from this till Christmas if you like."

Dr. Lovaway, though a young man and constitutionally timid, was capable of occasional firmness.

"I'm certainly not going to certify that boy as a lunatic," he said.

"Come now, doctor," said the sergeant persuasively, "after coming so far and the wet day and all. What have you to do only to put your name at the bottom of a

piece of paper? And Jimmy's willing to go. Aren't you, Jimmy?"

"I'll go if I'm wanted to go," said Jimmy.

The water boiled. Mrs. Finnegan was spreading butter on long slices cut from a home-baked loaf. It was Jimmy who took the kettle from the hook and filled the teapot.

"Mrs. Finnegan," said Dr. Lovaway, "why do you want the boy put into an asylum?"

"Is it me wanting him put away?" she said. "I want no such thing. The notion never entered my head, nor Michael's either, who's been like a father to the boy. Only when Constable Malone came to me, and when it was a matter of pleasing him and the sergeant, I didn't want to be disobliging, for the sergeant is always a good friend of mine, and Constable Malone is a young man I've a liking for. But as for wanting to get rid of Jimmy! Why would I? Nobody'd grudge the bit the creature would eat, and there's many a little turn he'd be doing for me about the house."

Mr. Finnegan was hovering in the background, half hidden in the smoke which filled the house. He felt that he ought to support his wife.

"What I said to the sergeant," he said, "no longer ago than last Friday when I

happened to be in town about a case I had on in the Petty Sessions' Court—what I said to the sergeant was this: 'So long as the boy isn't kept there too long, and so long as he's willing to go——' "

Jimmy, seated again on his low stool before the fire, looked up.

"Amn't I ready to go wherever I'm wanted?" he said.

"There you are now, doctor," said the sergeant. "You'll not refuse the poor boy when he wants to go?"

"Sergeant," said Dr. Lovaway, "I can't, I really can't certify that boy is a lunatic. I don't understand why you ask me to. It seems to me——"

Poor Lovaway was much agitated. It seemed to him that he had been drawn into an infamous conspiracy against the liberty of a particularly helpless human being.

"I don't think you ought to have asked me to come here," he said. "I don't think you should have suggested—— It seems to me, sergeant, that your conduct has been most reprehensible. I'm inclined to think I ought to report the matter to —to——" Dr. Lovaway was not quite sure about the proper place to which to send a report about the conduct of a sergeant of the Irish Police. "To the proper authorties," he concluded feebly.

"There, there," said the sergeant, soothingly, "we'll say no more about the matter. I wouldn't like you to be vexed, doctor."

But Dr. Lovaway, having once begun to speak his mind, was not inclined to stop.

"This isn't the first time this sort of thing has happened," he said. "You've asked me to certify lunacy in some very doubtful cases. I don't understand your motives, but——"

"Well, well," said the sergeant, "there's no harm done anyway."

Mrs. Finnegan, like all good women, was anxious to keep the peace among the men under her roof.

"Is the tea to your liking, doctor," she said, "or will I give you a taste more sugar in it? I'm a great one for sugar myself, but they tell me there's them that drinks tea with ne'er a grain of sugar in it at all. They must be queer people that do that."

She held a spoon, heaped up with sugar, over the doctor's cup as he spoke. He was obliged to stop lecturing the sergeant in order to convince her that his tea was already quite sweet enough. It was, indeed, far too sweet for his taste, for he was one of those queer people whose tastes Mrs. Finnegan could not understand.

The drive home ought to have been in every way pleasanter than the drive out to Ballygran. Patsy Doolan's mare was

subdued in temper; so docile, indeed, that she allowed Jimmy to put her between the shafts. She made no attempt to stand on her hind legs, and did not shy even at a young pig which bolted across the road in front of her. Dr. Lovaway could sit on his side of the car without holding on. The rain had ceased and great wisps of mist were sweeping clear of the hilltops, leaving fine views of grey rock and heather-clad slopes. But Dr. Lovaway did not enjoy himself. Being an Englishman he had a strong sense of duty, and was afflicted as no Irishman ever is by a civic conscience. He felt that he ought to bring home somehow to Sergeant Rahilly a sense of the iniquity of trying to shut up sane, or almost sane, people in lunatic asylums. Being of a gentle and friendly nature he hated making himself unpleasant to anyone, especially to a man like Sergeant Rahilly, who had been very kind to him.

The path of duty was not made any easier to him by the behaviour of the sergeant. Instead of being overwhelmed by a sense of discovered guilt, the police, both Rahilly and Constable Malone, were pleasantly chatty, and evidently bent on making the drive home as agreeable as possible for the doctor. They told him the names of the hills and the more distant mountains. They showed the exact bank at the side of the

road from behind which certain murderous men had fired at a land agent in 1885. They explained the route of a light railway which a forgotten Chief Secretary had planned but had never built owing to change of Government and his loss of office. Not one word was said about Jimmy, or lunatics, or asylums. It was with great difficulty that Dr. Lovaway succeeded at last in breaking in on the smooth flow of chatty reminiscences. But when he did speak he spoke strongly. As with most gentle and timid men, his language was almost violent when he had screwed himself up to the point of speaking at all.

The two policemen listened to all he said with the utmost good humour. Indeed, the sergeant supported him.

"You hear what the doctor's saying to you, Constable Malone," he said.

"I do, surely," said the constable.

"Well, I hope you'll attend to it," said the sergeant, "and let there be no more of the sort of work that the doctor's complaining of."

"But I mean you too, sergeant," said Dr. Lovaway. "You're just as much to blame as the constable. Indeed more, for you're his superior officer."

"I know that," said the sergeant; "I know that well. And what's more, I'm thankful to you, doctor, for speaking out

what's in your mind. Many a one wouldn't do it. And I know that every word you've been saying is for my good and for the good of Constable Malone, who's a young man yet and might improve if handled right. That's why I'm thanking you, doctor, for what you've said."

When Solomon said that a soft answer turneth away wrath he understated a great truth. A soft answer, if soft enough, will deflect the stroke of the sword of justice. Dr. Lovaway, though his conscience was still uneasy, could say no more. He felt that it was totally impossible to report Sergeant Rahilly's way of dealing with lunatics to the higher authorities.

That night Sergeant Rahilly called on Mr. Flanagan, going into the house by the back door, for the hour was late. He chose porter rather than whisky, feeling perhaps that his nerves needed soothing and that a stronger stimulant might be a little too much for him. After finishing a second bottle and opening a third, he spoke.

"I'm troubled in my mind," he said, "over this new doctor. Here I am doing the best I can for him ever since he came to the town, according to what I promised Dr. Farelly."

"No man," said Flanagan, "could do more than what you've done. Everyone knows that."

"I've set the police scouring the country," said the sergeant, "searching high and low and in and out for anyone, man or woman, that was the least bit queer in the head. They've worked hard, so they have, and I've worked hard myself."

"No man harder," said Flanagan.

"And every one we found," said the sergeant, "was a guinea into the doctor's pocket. A guinea, mind you, that's the fee for certifying a lunatic, and devil a penny either I or the constables get out of it."

"Nor you wouldn't be looking for it, sergeant. I know that."

"I would not. And I'm not complaining of getting nothing. But it's damned hard when the doctor won't take what's offered to him, when we've had to work early and late to get it for him. Would you believe it now, Mr. Flanagan, he's refused to certify half of the ones we've found for him?"

"Do you tell me that?" said Flanagan.

"Throwing good money away," said the sergeant; "and to-day, when I took him to see that boy that does be living in Finnegan's, which would have been two guineas into his pocket, on account of being outside his own district, instead of saying 'thank you' like any ordinary man would, nothing would do him only to be cursing and swearing. 'It's a crime,' says he, 'and a scandal,' says he, 'and it's swearing away the liberty

of a poor man,' says he; and more to that. Now I ask you, Mr. Flanagan, where's the crime and where's the scandal?"

"There's none," said Flanagan. "What harm would it have done the lad to be put away for a bit?"

"That's what I said to the doctor. What's more, they'd have let the boy out in a fortnight, as soon as they knew what way it was with him. I told the doctor that, but 'crime,' says he, and 'scandal,' says he, and 'conspiracy,' says he. Be damn, but to hear him talk you'd think I was trying to take two guineas out of his pocket instead of trying to put it in, and there's the thanks I get for going out of my way to do the best I could for him so as he'd rest content in this place and let Dr. Farelly stay where he is to be cutting the legs off the Germans."

"It's hard, so it is," said Flanagan, "and I'm sorry for you, sergeant. But that's the way things is. As I was saying to you once before and maybe oftener, the English is queer people, and the more you'd be trying to please them the less they like it. It's not easy to deal with them, and that's a fact."

V

THE BANDS OF BALLYGUTTERY

THE Wolfe Tone Republican Club has its headquarters at Ballyguttery. Its members, as may be guessed, profess the strongest form of Nationalism. There are about sixty of them. The Loyal True-Blue Invincibles are an Orange Lodge. They also meet in Ballyguttery. There are between seventy and eighty Loyal Invincibles. There are also in the village ten adult males who are not members of either the club or the lodge. Six of these are policemen. The other four are feeble people of no account, who neglect the first duty of good citizens and take no interest in politics.

Early in September the Wolfe Tone Republicans determined to hold a demonstration. They wished to convince a watching world, especially the United States of America, that the people of Ballyguttery are unanimous and enthusiastic in the cause of Irish independence. They proposed to march through the village street in procession, with a band playing tunes in front of them,

and then to listen to speeches made by eminent men in a field.

The Loyal Invincibles heard of the intended demonstration. They could hardly help hearing of it, for the Wolfe Tone Republicans talked of nothing else, and the people of Ballyguttery, whatever their politics, live on friendly terms with each other and enjoy long talks about public affairs.

The Loyal Invincibles at once assembled and passed a long resolution, expressing their determination to put a stop to any Nationalist demonstration. They were moved, they said, by the necessity for preserving law and order, safeguarding life and property, and maintaining civil and religious liberty. No intention could have been better than theirs; but the Wolfe Tone Republicans also had excellent intentions, and did not see why they should not demonstrate if they wished to. They invited all the eminent men they could think of to make speeches for them. They also spent a good deal of money on printing, and placarded the walls round the village with posters, announcing that their demonstration would be held on September fifteenth, the anniversary of the execution of their patron Wolfe Tone by the English.

In fact Wolfe Tone was not executed by the English or any one else, and the date of his death was November the nineteenth. But that made no difference to either side, because

no one in Ballyguttery ever reads history.

The Loyal True-Blue Invincibles did not tear down the posters. They were kindly men, averse to unneighbourly acts. But they put up posters of their own, summoning every man of sound principles to assemble on September fifteenth at 10.30 A.M., in order to preserve law, order, life, property, and liberty, by force if necessary.

Mr. Hinde, District Inspector of Police in Ballyguttery, was considering the situation. He was in an uncomfortable position, for he had only four constables and one sergeant under his command. It seemed to him that law and order would disppear for the time, life and property be in danger, and that he would not be able to interfere very much with anybody's liberty. Mr. Hinde was, however, a young man of naturally optimistic temper. He had lived in Ireland all his life, and he had a profound belief in the happening of unexpected things.

On September the tenth the Wolfe Tone Republicans made a most distressing discovery. Six months before, they had lent their band instruments to the Thomas Emmet Club, an important association of Nationalists in the neighbouring village.

The Thomas Emmets, faced with a demand for the return of the instruments, confessed that they had lent them to the Martyred Archbishops' branch of the Gaelic League.

They, in turn, had lent them to the Manchester Martyrs' Gaelic Football Association. These athletes would, no doubt, have returned the instruments honestly; but unfortunately their association had been suppressed by the Government six weeks earlier and had only just been re-formed as the Irish Ireland National Brotherhood.

In the process of dissolution and reincarnation the band instruments had disappeared. No one knew where they were. The only suggestion the footballers had to make was that the police had taken them when suppressing the Manchester Martyrs. This seemed probable, and the members of the Wolfe Tone Republican Club asked their president, Mr. Cornelius O'Farrelly, to call on Mr. Hinde and inquire into the matter.

Mr. Hinde was surprised, very agreeably surprised, at receiving a visit one evening from the president of the Republican Club. In Ireland, leading politicians, whatever school they belong to, are seldom on friendly terms with the police. He greeted O'Farrelly warmly.

"What I was wishing to speak to you about was this—" O'Farrelly began.

"Fill your pipe before you begin talking," said Mr. Hinde. "Here's some tobacco." He offered his pouch as he spoke. "I wish I could offer you a drink; but there's no whisky to be got nowadays."

"I know that," said O'Farrelly in a friendly tone, "and what's more, I know you'd offer it to me if you had it."

He filled his pipe and lit it. Then he began again: "What I was wishing to speak to you about is the band instruments."

"If you want a subscription—" said Hinde.

"I do not want any subscription."

"That's just as well, for you wouldn't get it if you did. I've no money, for one thing; and besides it wouldn't suit a man in my position to be subscribing to rebel bands."

"I wouldn't ask you," said O'Farrelly. "Don't I know as well as yourself that it would be no use? And anyway it isn't the money we want, but our own band instruments."

"What's happened to them?" said Hinde. "You had a lot. Last time I saw your band it was fitted out with drums and trumpets enough for a regiment."

"It's just them we're trying to get back."

"If any one has stolen them," said Hinde. "I'll look into the matter and do my best to catch the thief for you."

"Nobody stole them," said O'Farrelly; "not what you'd call stealing, anyway; but it's our belief that the police has them."

"You're wrong there," said Hinde. "The police never touched your instruments, and wouldn't."

"They might not if they knew they were ours. But from information received we think the police took them instruments the time they were suppressing the Manchester Martyrs beyond in Lisnan, the instruments being lent to them footballers at that time."

"I remember all about that business," said Hinde. "I was there myself. But we never saw your instruments. All we took away with us was two old footballs and a set of rotten goal-posts. Whatever happened to your instruments, we didn't take them. I expect," said Hinde, "that the Manchester Martyr boys pawned them."

O'Farrelly sat silent. It was unfortunately quite possible that the members of the football club had pawned the instruments, intending, of course, to redeem them when the club funds permitted.

"I'm sorry for you," said Hinde. "It's awkward for you losing your drums and things just now, with this demonstration of yours advertised all over the place. You'll hardly be able to hold the demonstration, will you?"

"The demonstration will be held," said O'Farrelly firmly.

"Not without a band, surely. Hang it all, O'Farrelly, a demonstration is no kind of use without a band. It wouldn't be a demonstration. You know that as well as I do."

O'Farrelly was painfully aware that a demonstration without a band is a poor business. He rose sadly and said good night. Hinde felt sorry for him.

"If the police had any instruments," he said, "I'd lend them to you. But we haven't a band of our own here. There aren't enough of us."

This assurance, though it was of no actual use, cheered O'Farrelly. It occurred to him that though the police had no band instruments to lend it might be possible to borrow elsewhere. The Loyal True-Blue Invincibles, for instance, had a very fine band, well supplied in every way, particularly with big drums. O'Farrelly thought the situation over and then called on Jimmy McLoughlin, the blacksmith, who was the secretary of the Orange Lodge.

"Jimmy," said O'Farrelly, "we're in trouble about the demonstration that's to be held next Tuesday."

"It'd be better for you," said Jimmy, "if that demonstration was never held. For let me tell you this: the Lodge boys has their minds made up to have no Papist rebels demonstrating here."

"It isn't you, nor your Orange Lodge, nor all the damned Protestants in Ireland would be fit to stop us," said O'Farrelly.

Jimmy McLoughlin spit on his hands as if in preparation for the fray. Then he wiped

them on his apron, remembering that the time for fighting had not yet come.

"And what's the matter with your demonstration?" he asked.

"It's the want of instruments for the band that has us held up," said O'Farrelly. "We lent them, so we did, and the fellows that had them didn't return them."

Jimmy McLoughlin pondered the situation. He was as well aware as Mr. Hinde, as O'Farrelly himself, that a demonstration without a band is a vain thing.

"It would be a pity now," he said slowly, "if anything was to interfere with that demonstration, seeing as how you're ready for it and we're ready for you."

"It would be a pity. Leaving aside any political or religious differences that might be dividing the people of Ballyguttery, it would be a pity for the whole of us if that demonstration was not to be held."

"How would it be now," said Jimmy McLoughlin, "if we was to lend you our instruments for the day?"

"We'd be thankful to you if you did, very thankful," said O'Farrelly; "and, indeed, it's no more than I'd expect from you, Jimmy, for you always were a good neighbour. But are you sure that you'll not be wanting them yourselves?"

"We will not want them," said Jimmy McLoughlin. "It'll not be drums we'll be

beating that day—not drums, but the heads of Papists. But mind what I'm saying to you now. If we lend you the instruments, you'll have to promise that you'll not carry them beyond the cross-roads this side of Dicky's Brae. You'll leave the whole of them there beyond the cross-roads, drums and all. It wouldn't do if any of the instruments got broke on us or the drums lost—which is what has happened more than once when there's been a bit of a fight. And it'll be at Dicky's Brae that we'll be waiting for you."

"I thought as much," said O'Farrelly, "and I'd be as sorry as you'd be yourself if any harm was to come to your drums. They'll be left at the cross-roads the way you tell me. You may take my word for that. You can pick them up there yourselves and take them back with you when you're going home in the evening—those of you that'll be left alive to go home. For we'll be ready for you, Jimmy, and Dicky's Brae will suit us just as well as any other place."

The Wolfe Tone Republicans are honorable men. Their band marched at the head of the procession through the streets of the village. They played all the most seditious tunes there are, and went on playing for half a mile outside the village. The police, headed by Mr. Hinde, followed them. At the cross-roads there was a halt. The bandsmen laid down the instruments very

carefully on a pile of stones beside the road. Then they took the fork of the road which leads southwards.

The direct route to Dicky's Brae lies northwest along the other fork of the road. Cornelius O'Farrelly had the instinct of a military commander. His idea was to make a wide detour, march by a cross-road and take the Dicky Brae position in the rear. This would require some time; but the demonstrators had a long day before them, and if the speeches were cut a little short no one would be any the worse.

Jimmy McLoughlin and the members of the Loyal True-Blue Invincibles sat on the roadside at the foot of Dicky's Brae and waited. They expected that the Wolfe Tone Republicans would reach the place about noon. At a quarter to twelve Mr. Hinde and five police arrived. They had with them a cart carefully covered with sacking. No one was in the least disturbed by their appearance. Five police, even with an officer at their head, can not do much to annoy two armies of sixty and seventy men.

The police halted in the middle of the road. They made no attempt to unload their cart.

At half-past one Jimmy McLoughlin took council with some of the leading members of the Loyal True-Blue Invincible Lodge. It seemed likely that the Wolfe Tone Republicans had gone off to demonstrate in

some other direction, deliberately shirking the fight which had been promised them.

"I'd never have thought it of Cornelius O'Farrelly," said Jimmy sadly. "I had a better opinion of him, so I had. I knew he was a Papist and a rebel and every kind of a blackguard, but I'd never have thought he was a coward."

While he spoke, a small boy came running down the hill. He brought the surprising intelligence that the Wolfe Tone Republicans were advancing in good order from a totally unexpected direction. Jimmy McLoughlin looked round and saw them. So did Mr. Hinde.

While Jimmy summoned his men from the ditches where they were smoking and the fields into which they had wandered, Mr. Hinde gave an order to his police. They took the sacking from their cart. Underneath it were all the band instruments belonging to the Orange Lodge. The police unpacked them carefully and then, loaded with drums and brass instruments, went up the road to meet the Wolfe Tone Republicans.

Jimmy McLoughlin ran to Mr. Hinde, shouting as he went:

"What are you doing with them drums?"

Mr. Hinde turned and waited for them.

"I'm going to hand them over to Cornelius O'Farrelly," he said.

"You're going to do nothing of the sort," said Jimmy, "for they're our drums, so they are."

"I don't know anything about that," said Mr. Hinde, "all I know is that they're the instruments which O'Farrelly's band were playing when they marched out of the town. They left them on the side of the road, where my men found them."

"What right had you to be touching them at all," said Jimmy.

"Every right. O'Farrelly was complaining to me three days ago that one set of band instruments had been stolen from him. It's my business to see that he doesn't lose another set in the same way, even if he's careless enough to leave them lying about on the side of the road."

"Amn't I telling you that they're ours, not his?" said Jimmy.

"You'll have to settle that with him."

"Sure, if I settle that with him," said Jimmy, "in the only way anything could be settled with a pack of rebels, the instruments will be broke into smithereens before we're done."

This seemed very likely. Jimmy McLoughlin's bandsmen, armed with sticks and stones, were forming up on the road. The police had already handed over the largest drum to one of the leading Wolfe Tone Republicans. It was Cornelius O'Farrelly

who made an attempt to save the situation.

He came forward and addressed Mr. Hinde. "It would be better," he said, "if you'd march the police off out of this and let them take the band instruments along with them, for if they don't the drums will surely be broke and the rest of the things twisted up so as nobody'll ever be able to blow a tune on them again, which would be a pity and a great loss to all parties concerned."

"I'll take the police away if you like," said Mr Hinde, "but I'm hanged if I go on carting all those instruments about the country. I found them on the side of the road where you left them, and now that I've given them back to you I'll take no further responsibility in the matter."

The two sets of bandsmen were facing each other on the road. The instruments were divided between them. They were uttering the most bloodthirsty threats, and it was plain that in a minute or two there would be a scrimmage.

"Jimmy," said O'Farrelly, "if the boys gets to fighting——"

"I don't know," said Jimmy gloomily, "where the money's to come from to buy new drums."

"It might be better," said O'Farrelly, "if we was to go home and leave the instruments back safe where they came from before worse comes of it."

Ten minutes later the instruments were safely packed again into the cart. One of the Loyal True-Blue Invincibles led the horse. A Wolfe Tone Republican sat in the cart and held the reins. Jimmy McLoughlin and Cornelius O'Farrelly walked together. It was plain to every one that hostilities were suspended for the day.

"I'm thinking," said Jimmy, "that ye didn't hold your demonstration after all. I hope this'll be a lesson to you not to be trying anything of the sort for the future."

"For all your fine talk," said O'Farrelly, "you didn't stop us. And why not? Because you weren't fit to do it."

"We could have done it," said Jimmy, "and we would. But what's the use of talking? So long as no demonstration was held we're satisfied."

"So long as you didn't get interfering with us, we're satisfied."

Mr. Hinde, walking behind the procession with his five police, had perhaps the best reason of all for satisfaction.

VI

STARTING THE TRAIN

TOM O'DONOVAN leaned as far as possible out of the window of the railway carriage, a first-class smoking carriage.

"Good-bye Jessie, old girl," he said. "I'll be back the day after to-morrow, or the next day at latest. Take care of yourself."

Mrs. O'Donovan, who was not very tall, stood on tip-toe while he kissed her.

"You'll have time enough to get dinner in Dublin," she said, "or will you dine on the boat?"

"They give you a pretty fair dinner on the boat," said Tom, "and it's less fussy to go on board at once."

She had said that to him before, and he had made the same answer; but it is necessary to keep on saying something while waiting for a train to start, and on such occasions there is very seldom anything fresh to say.

"And you'll see Mr. Manners to-morrow morning," she said, after a short pause.

"Appointment for 10.30," said Tom. "I'll breakfast at the Euston Hotel and take

the tube to his office. Bye-bye, old girl."

But the "bye-bye," like the kiss, was premature. The train did not start.

"If I get Manners' agency," said Tom, "we'll be on the pig's back. You'll be driving about in a big car with a fur coat on you in the inside of six months."

"Be as fascinating as you can, Tom," she said.

"He'd hardly have asked me to go all the way to London," said Tom, "if he wasn't going to give me the agency."

They had reasoned all that out half-a-dozen times since the letter arrived which summoned Tom to an interview in Mr. Manners' office. There was no doubt that the agency, which meant the sole right of selling the Manners' machines in Ireland, would be exceedingly profitable. And Tom O'Donovan believed that he had secured it.

He glanced at the watch on his wrist.

"I wonder what the deuce we're waiting for," he said.

But passengers on Irish railways now-a-days are all accustomed to trains which do not start, and have learned the lesson of patience. Tom waited, without any sign of irritation. Mrs. O'Donovan chatted pleasantly to him. The train had reached the station in good time. It was due in Dublin two hours before the mail boat left Kingstown. There was no need to feel worried.

Yet at the end of half-an-hour Tom did begin to feel worried. When three-quarters of an hour had passed he became acutely anxious.

"If we don't get a move on soon," he said, "I shall miss the boat, and—I say, Jessie, this is getting serious."

Missing the boat meant missing his appointment in London next morning, and then—why, then, Manners would probably give the agency to someone else. Tom opened the door of his carriage and jumped out.

"I'll speak to the guard," he said, "and find out what's the matter."

The guard, a fat, good-humoured looking man, was talking earnestly to the engine driver. Tom O'Donovan addressed him explosively.

"Why the devil don't you go on?" he said.

"The train is not going on to-day," said the guard. "It'll maybe never go on at all."

"Why not?"

It was the engine driver who replied. He was a tall, grave man, and he spoke with dignity, as if he were accustomed to making public speeches on solemn occasions.

"This train," he said, "will not be used for the conveyance of the armed forces of the English Crown, which country is presently at war with the Irish Republic."

"There's soldiers got into the train at this station," said the guard, in a friendly explanatory tone, "and the way things is it

wouldn't suit us to be going on, as long as them ones," he pointed to the rear of the train with his thumb, "stays where they are."

"But—oh, hang it all!—if the train doesn't go on I shall miss the mail boat at Kingstown, and if I'm not in London to-morrow morning I shall lose the best part of £1,000 a year."

"That would be a pity now," said the guard. "And I'd be sorry for any gentleman to be put to such a loss. But what can we do? The way things is at the present time it wouldn't suit either the driver or me to be taking the train on while there'd be soldiers in it. It's queer times we're having at present and that's a fact."

The extreme queerness of the times offered no kind of consolation to Tom O'Donovan. But he knew it was no good arguing with the guard. He contented himself with the fervent expression of an opinion which he honestly held.

"It would be a jolly good thing for everybody," he said, "if the English army and the Irish Republic and your silly war and every kind of idiot who goes in for politics were put into a pot together and boiled down for soup."

He turned and walked away. As he went he heard the guard expressing mild agreement with his sentiment.

"It might be," said the guard. "I wouldn't say but that might be the best in the latter end."

Tom O'Donovan, having failed with the guard and the engine driver, made up his mind to try what he could do with the soldiers. He was not very hopeful of persuading them to leave the train; but his position was so nearly desperate that he was unwilling to surrender any chance. He found a smart young sergeant and six men of the Royal Wessex Light Infantry seated in a third-class carriage. They wore shrapnel helmets, and their rifles were propped up between their knees.

"Sergeant," said Tom, "I suppose you know you are holding up the whole train."

"My orders, Sir," said the sergeant, "is to travel—"

"Oh, I know all about your orders. But look here. It would suit you just as well to hold up the next train. There's another in two hours, and you can get into it and sit in it all night. But if you don't let this train go on I shall miss the boat at Kingstown, and if I'm not in London to-morrow morning I stand to lose £1,000 a year."

"Very sorry sir," said the sergeant, "but my orders— I'd be willing to oblige, especially any gentleman who is seriously inconvenienced. But orders is orders, sir."

Jessie O'Donovan, who had been following her husband up and down the platform caught his arm.

"What *is* the matter, Tom?" she said. "If the train doesn't start soon you'll miss the boat. Why don't they go on?"

"Oh, politics, as usual, Jessie," said Tom. "I declare to goodness it's enough to make a man want to go to heaven before his time, just to be able to live under an absolute monarchy where there can't be any politics. But I'm not done yet. I'll have another try at getting along before I chuck the whole thing up. Is there a girl anywhere about, a good-looking girl?"

"There's the young woman in the bookstall," said Jessie, "but she's not exactly pretty. What do you want a girl for?"

Tom glanced at the bookstall.

"She won't do at all," he said. "They all know her, and, besides, she doesn't look the part. But I know where I'll get the girl I want. Jessie, do you run over to the booking office and buy two third-class returns to Dublin."

He left her standing on the platform while he jumped on to the line behind the train, crossed it, and climbed the other platform. She saw him pass through the gate and run along the road to the town. Being a loyal and obedient wife she went to the booking office and bought two tickets, undisturbed by the knowledge that

her husband was running fast in search of a girl, a good-looking girl.

Tom O'Donovan, having run a hundred yards at high speed, entered a small tobacconist's shop. Behind the counter was a girl, young and very pretty. She was one of those girls whose soft appealing eyes and general look of timid helplessness excite first the pity, then the affection of most men.

"Susie," said Tom O'Donovan, breathlessly, "run upstairs and put on your best dress and your nicest hat and all the ribbons and beads you have. Make yourself look as pretty as you can, but don't be more than ten minutes over the job. And send your father to me."

Tom O'Donovan was a regular and valued customer. Susie had known him as a most agreeable gentleman since she was ten years old. She saw that he was in a hurry and occupied with some important affair. She did as he told her without stopping to ask any questions. Two minutes later her father entered the shop from the room behind it.

"Farrelly," said Tom O'Donovan, "I want the loan of your daughter for about four hours. She'll be back by the last train down from Dublin."

"If it was any other gentleman only yourself, Mr. O'Donovan, who asked me the

like of that I'd kick him out of the shop."

"Oh! it's all right," said Tom, "my wife will be with her the whole time and bring her back safe."

"I'm not asking what you want her for, Mr. O'Donovan," said Farrelly, "but if it was any other gentleman only yourself I would ask."

"I want to take her up to Dublin along with my wife," said Tom, "and send her down by the next train. I'd explain the whole thing to you if I had time, but I haven't. All I can tell you is that I'll most likely lose £1,000 a year if I don't get Susie."

"Say no more, Mr. O'Donovan," said Farrelly. "If that's the way of it you and Mrs. O'Donovan can have the loan of Susie for as long as pleases you."

Susie changed her dress amazingly quickly. She was back in the shop in six minutes, wearing a beautiful blue hat, a frock that was almost new, and three strings of beads round her neck.

"Come on," said O'Donovan, "we haven't a minute to lose."

They walked together very quickly to the station.

"Susie," said Tom, "I'm going to put you into a carriage by yourself, and when you get there you're to sit in a corner and cry. If you can't cry—"

"I can if I like," said Susie.

"Very well, then, do. Get your eyes red and your face swollen and have tears running down your cheeks if you can manage it, and when I come for you again you're to sob. Don't speak a word no matter what anyone says to you, but sob like—like a motor bicycle."

"I will," said Susie.

"And if you do it well, I'll buy you the smartest blouse in London to-morrow and bring it home to you."

When they reached the station they jumped down from the platform and crossed the line to the train. Tom opened the door of an empty third-class carriage and pushed Susie into it. Then he went round to the back of the train and climbed on to the platform. He made straight for the carriage in which the soldiers sat.

"Sergeant," he said, "will you come along with me for a minute?"

The sergeant, who was beginning to find his long vigil rather dull, warned his men to stay where they were. Then he got out and followed Tom O'Donovan. Tom led him to the carriage in which Susie sat. The girl had done very well since he left her. Her eyes were red and swollen. Her cheeks were slobbered. She held a handkerchief in her hand rolled into a tight damp ball.

"You see that girl," said Tom.

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant. "Seems to be in trouble, sir."

"She's in perfectly frightful trouble," said Tom. "She's on her way to Dublin—or she would be if this train would start—so as to catch the night mail to Cork. She was to have been married in Cork to-morrow morning and to have gone off to America by a steamer which leaves Queenstown at 10.30 a.m. Now of course, the whole thing is off. She won't get to Dublin or Cork, and so can't be married."

Susie, when she heard this pitiful story, sobbed convulsively.

"It's very sad," said Tom.

The sergeant, a nice, tender-hearted young man, looked at Susie's pretty face and was greatly affected.

"Perhaps her young man will wait for her, sir," he said.

"He can't do that," said Tom. "The fact is that he's a demobilised soldier, served all through the war and won the V.C. And the Sinn Feiners have warned him that he'll be shot if he isn't out of the country before mid-day to-morrow."

Susie continued to sob with great vigour and intensity. The sergeant was deeply moved.

"It's cruel hard sir," he said. "But my orders—"

"I'm not asking you to disobey orders," said Tom, "but in a case like this, for the sake of that poor young girl and the gallant

soldier who wants to marry her—a comrade of your own, sergeant. You may have known him out in France—I think you ought to stretch a point. Listen to me now!"

He drew the sergeant away from the door of the carriage and whispered to him.

"I'll do it, sir," said the sergeant. "My orders says nothing about that point."

"You do what I suggest," said Tom, "and I'll fix things up with the guard."

He found the guard and the engine driver awaiting events in the station-master's office. They were quite willing to follow him to the carriage in which Susie sat. They listened with deep emotion to the story which Tom told them. It was exactly the same story which he told the sergeant, except this time the bridegroom was a battalion commander of the Irish Volunteers whose life was threatened by a malignant Black-and-Tan. Susie sobbed as bitterly as before.

"It's a hard case, so it is," said the guard, "and if there was any way of getting the young lady to Dublin—"

"There's only one way," said Tom, "and that's to take on this train."

"It's what we can't do," said the engine driver, "not if all the girls in Ireland was wanting to get married. So long as the armed forces of England—"

"But they're not armed," said Tom.

"Michael," said the engine driver to the guard, "did you not tell me that them soldiers has guns with them and tin hats on their heads?"

"I did tell you that," said the guard, "and I told you the truth."

"My impression is," said Tom, "that those soldiers aren't armed at all. They seem to be a harmless set of men off to Dublin on leave, very likely going to be married themselves. They're certainly not on duty."

The engine driver scratched his head.

Susie, inspired by a wink from Tom, broke into a desparing wail.

"If that's the way of it," said the engine driver, "it would be different, of course."

"Come and see," said Tom.

The sergeant and his men were sitting in their compartment smoking cigarettes. Their heads were bare. Most of them had their tunics unbuttoned. One of them was singing a song, in which the whole party joined:

"*Mary, Jane and Polly*
Find it very jolly
When we take them out with us to
Tea—tea—tea!"

There was not a single rifle to be seen anywhere.

"There now," said Tom. "You see for yourselves. You can't call those men munitions of war."

The guard, who had seen the soldiers march into the station, was puzzled; but

the engine driver seemed convinced that there had been some mistake.

"I'll do it," he said, "for the sake of the young girl and the brave lad that wants to marry her, I'll take the train to Dublin."

"Well, hurry up," said Tom. "Drive that old engine of yours for all she's worth."

The driver hastened to his post. The guard blew his whistle shrilly. Tom seized his wife by the arm.

"Hop into the carriage with Susie Farrelly," he said. "Dry her eyes, and tell her I'll spend £5 on a silk blouse for her, pink or blue or any colour she likes. I'll explain the whole thing to you when we get to Dublin. I can't travel with you. The guard is only half convinced and might turn suspicious if he saw us together."

Tom O'Donovan caught, just caught the mail boat at Kingstown. He secured the agency for the sale of the Manners' machines in Ireland. He is in a fair way to becoming a very prosperous man; but it is unlikely that he will ever be a member either of Parliament or Dail Eireann. He says that politics interfere with business.

VII

UNLAWFUL POSSESSION

WHEN Willie Thornton, 2nd Lieutenant in the Wessex Fusiliers, was sent to Ireland, his mother was nervous and anxious. She had an idea that the shooting of men in uniform was a popular Irish sport and that her boy would have been safer in Germany, Mesopotamia, or even Russia. Willie, who looked forward to some hunting with a famous Irish pack, laughed at his mother. It was his turn to be nervous and anxious when, three weeks after joining his battalion, he received an independent command. He was a cheerful boy and he was not in the least afraid that anyone would shoot him or his men. But the way the Colonel talked to him made him uncomfortable.

"There's your village," said the Colonel.

Willie peered at the map spread on the orderly-room table, and saw, in very small print, the name Dunedin. It stood at a place where many roads met, where there was a bridge across a large river.

"You'll billet the men in your Court House," said the Colonel, "and you'll search every motor that goes through that village to cross the bridge."

"For arms, sir?" said Willie.

"For arms or ammunition," said the Colonel. "And you'll have to keep your eyes open, Thornton. These fellows are as cute as foxes. There isn't a trick they're not up to and they'll tell you stories plausible enough to deceive the devil himself."

That was what made Willie Thornton nervous. He would have faced the prospects of a straight fight with perfect self-confidence. He was by no means so sure of himself when it was a matter of outwitting men who were as cute as foxes; and "these fellows" was an unpleasantly vague description. It meant, no doubt, the Irish enemy, who, indeed, neither the Colonel nor Willie could manage to regard as an enemy at all. But it gave him very little idea of the form in which the enemy might present himself.

On the evening of Good Friday Willie marched his men into Dunedin and took possession of the Court House. That day was chosen because Easter is the recognized season for Irish rebellions, just as Christmas is the season for plum puddings in England, and May Day the time for Labour riots on the Continent. It is very convenient for

everybody concerned to have these things fixed. People know what to expect and preparations can be properly made. The weather was abominably wet. The village of Dunedin was muddy and looked miserable. The Court House, which seldom had fires in it, was damp and uncomfortable. Willie unloaded the two wagons which brought his men, kit, and rations, and tried to make the best of things.

The next day was also wet, but Willie, weighted by a sense of responsibility, got up early. By six o'clock he had the street which led to the bridge barricaded in such a way that no motor-car could possibly rush past. He set one of his wagons across the street with its back to the house and its pole sticking out. In this position it left only a narrow passage through which any vehicle could go. He set the other wagon a little lower down with its back to the houses on the opposite side of the street and its pole sticking out. Anyone driving towards the bridge would have to trace a course like the letter S, and, the curves being sharp, would be compelled to go very slowly. Willie surveyed this arrangement with satisfaction. But to make quite sure of holding up the traffic he stretched a rope from one wagon pole to the other so as to block the centre part of the S. Then he posted his sentries and went into the Court House to get some breakfast.

The people of Dunedin do not get up at six o'clock. Nowadays, owing to the imposition of "summer time" and the loss of Ireland's half-hour of Irish time, six o'clock is really only half-past four, and it is worse than folly to get out of bed at such an hour. It was eight o'clock by Willie Thornton's watch before the people became aware of what had happened to their street. They were surprised and full of curiosity, but they were not in the least annoyed. No one in Dunedin had the slightest intention of rebelling. No one even wanted to shoot a policeman. The consciences, even of the most ardent politicians, were clear, and they could afford to regard the performance of the soldiers as an entertainment provided free for their benefit by a kindly Government. That was, in fact, the view which the people of Dunedin took of Willie Thornton's barricade, and of his sentries, though the sentries ought to have inspired awe, for they carried loaded rifles and wore shrapnel helmets.

The small boys of the village—and there are enormous numbers of small boys in Dunedin—were particularly interested. They tried the experiment of passing through the barricade, stooping under the rope when they came to it, just to see what the soldiers would do. The soldiers did nothing. The boys then took to jumping over the rope, which they could do

when going downhill, though they had to creep under it on the way back. This seemed to amuse and please the soldiers, who smiled amiably at each successful jump. Kerrigan, the butcher, encouraged by the experience of the small boys, made a solemn progress from the top of the street to the bridge. He is the most important and the richest man in Dunedin, and it was generally felt that if the soldiers let him pass the street might be regarded as free to anyone. Kerrigan is a portly man, who could not have jumped the rope, and would have found it inconvenient to crawl under it. The soldiers politely loosed one end of the rope and let him walk through.

At nine o'clock a farmer's cart, laden with manure, crossed the bridge and began to climb the street. Willie Thornton came to the door of the Court House with a cigarette in his mouth and watched the cart. It was hoped by the people of Dunedin, especially by the small boys, that something would happen. Foot passengers might be allowed to pass, but a wheeled vehicle would surely be stopped. But the soldiers loosed the rope and let the cart go through without a question. Ten minutes later a governess cart, drawn by a pony, appeared at the top of the street. It, too, was passed through the barricade without difficulty. There was a general feeling of disappointment in the village, and most of the people

went back to their houses. It was raining heavily, and it is foolish to get wet through when there is no prospect of any kind of excitement. The soldiers, such was the general opinion, were merely practising some unusual and quite incomprehensible military manœuvre.

The opinion was a mistaken one. The few who braved the rain and stood their ground watching the soldiers, had their reward later on. At ten o'clock, Mr. Davoren, the auctioneer, drove into the village in his motor-car. Mr. Davoren lives in Ballymurry, a town of some size, six miles from Dunedin. His business requires him to move about the country a good deal, and he is quite wealthy enough to keep a Ford car. His appearance roused the soldiers to activity. Willie Thornton, without a cigarette this time, stood beside the barricade. A sentry, taking his place in the middle of the street, called to Mr. Davoren to halt. Mr. Davoren, who was coming along at a good pace, was greatly surprised, but he managed to stop his car and his engine a few feet from the muzzle of the sentry's rifle.

Willie Thornton, speaking politely but firmly, told Mr. Davoren to get out of the car. He did not know the auctioneer, and had no way of telling whether he was one of " these fellows " or not. The fact that

Mr. Davoren looked most respectable and fat was suspicious. A cute fox might pretend to be respectable and fat when bent on playing tricks. Mr. Davoren, still surprised but quite good-humoured, got out of his car. Willie Thornton and his sergeant searched it thoroughly. They found nothing in the way of a weapon more deadly than a set of tyre levers. Mr. Davoren was told he might go on. In the end he did go on, but not until he, the sergeant, Willie Thornton, and one of the sentries had worked themselves hot at the starting-crank. Ford engines are queer-tempered things, with a strong sense of self-respect. When stopped accidently and suddenly, they often stand on their dignity and refuse to go on again.

All this was pleasant and exciting for the people of Dunedin, who felt that they were not wasting their day or getting wet in vain. And still better things were in store for them. At eleven o'clock a large and handsome car appeared at the end of the street. It moved noiselessly and swiftly towards the barricade. The chauffeur, leaning back behind his glass screen, drove as if the village and the street belonged to him. Dunedin is, in fact, the property of his master, the Earl of Ramelton; so the chauffeur had some right to be stately and arrogant. Every man, woman, and child

in Dunedin knew the car, and there was tiptoe excitement. Would the soldiers venture to stop and search this car? The excitement became intense when it was seen that the Earl himself was in the car. He lay back very comfortably smoking a cigar in the covered tonneau of the limousine. Lord Ramelton is a wealthy man and Deputy Lieutenant for the county. He sits and sometimes speaks in the House of Lords. He is well known as an uncompromising Unionist, whose loyalty to the king and empire is so firm as to be almost aggressive.

There was a gasp of amazement when the sentry, standing with his rifle in his hands, called "Halt!" He gave the order to the earl's chauffeur quite as abruptly and disrespectfully as he had given it to Mr. Davoren. The chauffeur stopped the car and leaned back in his seat with an air of detachment and slight boredom. It was his business to stop or start the car and to drive where he was told. Why it was stopped or started or where it went were matters of entire indifference to him. Lord Ramelton let down the window beside him and put out his head.

"What the devil is the matter?" he said.

He spoke to the chauffeur, but it was Willie Thornton who answered him.

"I'm afraid I must trouble you to get

out of the car, sir; you and the chauffeur."

He had spoken quite as civilly to Mr. Davoren half an hour before. He added "sir" this time because Lord Ramelton is an oldish man, and Willie Thornton had been well brought up and taught by his mother that some respect is due to age. He did not know that he was speaking to an earl and a very great man. Lord Ramelton was not in the least soothed by the civility.

"Drive on, Simpkins," he said to the chauffeur.

Simpkins would have driven on if the sentry had not been standing, with a rifle in his hands, exactly in front of the car. He did the next best thing to driving on. He blew three sharp blasts of warning on his horn. The sentry took no notice of the horn. The men of the Wessex Fusiliers are determined and well-disciplined fellows. Willie Thornton's orders mattered to that sentry. Lord Ramelton's did not. Nor did the chauffeur's horn.

Willie Thornton stepped up to the window of the car. He noticed as he did so that an earl's coronet surmounting the letter R was painted on the door. He spoke apologetically, but he was still quite firm. A coronet painted on the door of a car is no proof that the man inside is an earl. The Colonel had warned Willie that "these fellows" were as cute as foxes.

"I'm afraid I must trouble you to get out, sir," said Willie. "My orders are to search every car that goes through the village."

Lord Ramelton had once been a soldier himself. He knew that the word "orders" has a sacred force.

"Oh, all right," he said. "It's damned silly; but if you've got to do it, get it over as quick as you can."

He turned up the collar of his coat and stepped out into the rain. The chauffeur left his seat and stood in the mud with the air of a patient but rather sulky martyr. What is the use of belonging to the aristocracy of labour, of being a member of the Motor Drivers' Union, of being able to hold up civilization to ransom, if you are yourself liable to be held up and made to stand in the rain by a common soldier, a man no better than an unskilled labourer. Nothing but the look of the rifle in the unskilled labourer's hand would have induced Simpkins to leave his sheltered place in the car.

Willie Thornton had every intention of conducting his search rapidly, perhaps not very thoroughly. Lord Ramelton's appearance, his voice, and the coronet on the panel, all taken together, were convincing evidence that he was not one of "these fellows," and might safely be allowed to pass.

Unfortunately there was something in

the car which Willie did not in the least expect to find there. In the front of the tonneau was a large packing-case. It was quite a common-looking packing-case made of rough wood. The lid was neatly but firmly nailed down. It bore on its side in large black letters the words "cube sugar."

Willie's suspicions were aroused. The owners of handsome and beautifully-upholstered cars do not usually drive about with packing-cases full of sugar at their feet. And this was a very large case. It contained a hundredweight or a hundredweight and a half of sugar—if it contained sugar at all. The words of the Colonel recurred to Willie: "There's not a trick they're not up to. They'd deceive the devil himself." Well, no earl or pretended earl should deceive Willie Thornton. He gave an order to the sergeant.

"Take that case and open it," he said.

"Damn it," said the Earl, "you mustn't do that."

"My orders," said Willie, "are to examine every car thoroughly."

"But if you set that case down in the mud and open it in this downpour of rain the—the contents will be spoiled."

"I can't help that, sir," said Willie. "My orders are quite definite."

"Look here," said Lord Ramelton, "if I give you my word that there are no arms or ammunition in that case, if I write a

statement to that effect and sign it, will it satisfy you?"

"No, sir," said Willie. "Nothing will satisfy me except seeing for myself."

Such is the devotion to duty of the young British officer. Against his spirit the rage of the empire's enemies breaks in vain. Nor are the statements of "these fellows," however plausible, of much avail.

Lord Ramelton swallowed, with some difficulty, the language which gathered on his tongue's tip.

"Where's your superior officer?" he said.

Willie Thornton believed that all his superior officers were at least ten miles away. He had not noticed—nor had anyone else—that a grey military motor had driven into the village. In the grey motor was a General, with two Staff Officers, all decorated with red cap-bands and red tabs on their coats.

The military authorities were very much in earnest over the business of searching motor-cars and guarding roads. Only at times of serious danger do Generals, accompanied by Staff Officers, go out in the wet to visit outpost detachments commanded by subalterns.

The General left his car and stepped across the road. He recognized Lord Ramelton at once and greeted him with cheery playfulness.

"Hallo!" he said. "Held up? I never expected you to be caught smuggling arms about the country."

"I wish you'd tell this boy to let me drive on," said Lord Ramelton. "I'm getting wet through."

The General turned to Willie Thornton.

"What's the matter?" he said.

Willie was pleasantly conscious that he had done nothing except obey his orders. He saluted smartly.

"There's a packing-case in the car, sir," he said, "and it ought to be examined."

The General looked into Lord Ramelton's car and saw the packing-case. He could scarcely deny that it might very easily contain cartridges, that it was indeed exactly the sort of case which should be opened. He turned to Lord Ramelton.

"It's marked sugar," he said. "What's in it really?"

Lord Ramelton took the General by the arm and led him a little way up the street. When they were out of earshot of the crowd round the car he spoke in a low voice.

"It *is* sugar," he said. "I give you my word that there's nothing in that case except sugar."

"Good Lord!" said the General. "Of course, when you say so it's all right, Ramelton. But would you mind telling me why you want to go driving about the country

with two or three hundredweight of sugar in your car?"

"It's not my sugar at all," said Lord Ramelton. "It's my wife's. You know the way we're rationed for sugar now—half a pound a head and the servants eat all of it. Well, her ladyship is bent on making some marmalade and rhubarb jam. I don't know how she did it, but she got some sugar from a man at Ballymurry. Wangled it. Isn't that the word?"

"Seems exactly the word," said the General.

"And I'm bringing it home to her. That's all."

"I see," said the General. "But why not have let the officer see what was in the case? Sugar is no business of his, and you'd have saved a lot of time and trouble."

"Because a village like this is simply full of spies."

"Spies!" said the General. "If I thought there were spies here I'd——"

"Oh, not the kind of spies you mean. The Dunedin people are far too sensible for that sort of thing. But if one of the shopkeepers here found out that a fellow in Ballymurry had been doing an illicit sugar deal he'd send a letter off to the Food Controller straight away. A man up in Dublin was fined £100 the other day for much less than we're doing. I don't want

my name in every newspaper in the kingdom for obtaining sugar by false pretences."

"All right," said the General. "It's nothing to me where you get your sugar."

Willie Thornton, much to his relief, was ordered to allow the Earl's car to proceed, unsearched. The chauffeur, who was accustomed to be dry and warm, caught a nasty chill, and was in a bad temper for a week. He wrote to the Secretary of his Union complaining of the brutal way in which the military tyrannized over the representatives of skilled labour. The people of Dunedin felt that they had enjoyed a novel and agreeable show. Lady Ramelton made a large quantity of rhubarb jam, thirty pots of marmalade, and had some sugar over for the green gooseberries when they grew large enough to preserve.

VIII

A SOUL FOR A LIFE

DENIS RYAN and Mary Drennan stood together at the corner of the wood where the road turns off and runs straight for a mile into the town. They were young, little more than boy and girl, but they were lovers and they stood together, as lovers do. His left arm was round her. His right hand held her hand. Her head rested on his shoulder.

"Mary darling," he whispered, "what's to hinder us being married soon?"

She raised her head from his shoulder and looked tenderly into his eyes.

"If it wasn't for my mother and my father, we might," she said; "but they don't like you, Denis, and they'll never consent."

Money comes between lovers sometimes; but it was not money, nor the want of it, which kept Mary and Denis apart. She was the daughter of a prosperous farmer—a rich man, as riches are reckoned in Ireland. He was a clerk in a lawyer's office, and poorly paid. But he might have earned more.

She would gladly have given up anything. And the objections of parents in such cases are not insuperable. But between these two there was something more. Denis Ryan was a revolutionary patriot. Mary Drennan's parents were proud of another loyalty. They hated what Denis loved. The two loyalties were strong and irreconcilable, like the loyalties of the South and the North when the South and the North were at war in America.

"What does it matter about your father and mother?" he said. "If you love me, Mary, isn't that enough?"

She hid her face on his shoulder again. He could barely hear the murmur of her answer.

"I love you altogether, Denis! I love you so much that I would give my soul for you!"

A man came down the road walking fast. He passed the gate of Drennan's farm and came near the corner where the lovers stood. Denis took his arm from Mary's waist, and they moved a little apart. The man stopped when he came to them.

"Good-evening, Denis!" he said. "Good-evening, Miss Drennan!"

The greeting was friendly enough, but he looked at the girl with unfriendly eyes.

"Don't forget the meeting to-night, Denis!" he said. "It's in Flaherty's barn

at nine o'clock. Mind, now! It's important, and you'll be expected!"

The words were friendly, but there was the hint of a threat in the way they were spoken. Without waiting for an answer, he walked on quickly towards the town. Mary stretched out her hands and clung tight to her lover's arm. She looked up at him, and fear was in her face.

"What is it, Denis?" she asked. "What does Michael Murnihan want with you?"

Women in Ireland have reason to be frightened now. Their lovers, their husbands, and their sons may be members of a secret society, or they may incur the enmity of desperate man. No woman knows for certain that the life of the man she loves is safe.

"What's the meeting, Denis?" she whispered. "What does he want you to do?"

He neither put his arm round her nor took her hand again.

"It's nothing, Mary," he said. "It's nothing at all!"

But she was more disquieted at his words, for he turned his face away from her when he spoke.

"What is it?" she whispered again. "Tell me, Denis!"

"It's a gentleman down from Dublin that's to talk to the boys to-night," he said,

" and the members of the club must be there to listen to him. It will be about learning Irish that he'll talk, maybe, or not enlisting in the English Army."

" Is that all, Denis ? Are you sure now that's all ? Will he not want you to do anything ? "

That part of the country was quiet enough. But elsewhere there were raidings of houses, attacks on police barracks, shootings, woundings, murders ; and afterwards arrests, imprisonments, and swift, wild vengeance taken. Mary was afraid of what the man from Dublin might want. Denis turned to her, and she could see that he was frightened too.

" Mary, Mary ! " he said. " Whatever comes or goes, there'll be no harm done to you or yours ! "

She loosed her hold on his arm and turned from him with a sigh.

" I must be going from you now, Denis," she said. " Mother will be looking for me, and the dear God knows what she'd say if she knew I'd been here talking to you."

Mrs. Drennan knew very well where her daughter had been. She spoke her mind plainly when Mary entered the farm kitchen.

" I'll not have you talking or walking with Denis Ryan," she said ; " nor your father won't have it ! Everybody knows what he is, and what his friends are. There's

nothing too bad for those fellows to do, and no daughter of mine will mix herself up with them!"

"Denis isn't doing anything wrong, mother," said Mary. "And if he thinks Ireland ought to be a free republic, hasn't he as good a right to his own opinion as you or me, or my father either?"

"No man has a right to be shooting and murdering innocent people, whether they're policemen or whatever they are. And that's what Denis Ryan and the rest of them are at, day and night, all over the country. And if they're not doing it here yet, they soon will. Blackguards, I call them, and the sooner they're hanged the better, every one of them!"

. . . . . .

In Flaherty's barn that night the gentleman from Dublin spoke to an audience of some twenty or thirty young men. He spoke with passion and conviction. He told again the thousand times repeated story of the wrongs which Ireland has suffered at the hands of the English in old, old days. He told of more recent happenings, of men arrested and imprisoned without trial, without even definite accusation, of intolerable infringements of the common rights. He spoke of the glorious hope of national liberty, of Ireland as a free Republic. The men he spoke to, young men

all of them, listened with flashing eyes, with clenched teeth, and faces moist with emotion. They responded to his words with sudden growlings and curses. The speaker went on to tell of the deeds of men elsewhere in Ireland. "The soldiers of the Irish Republic," so he called them. They had attacked the armed forces of English rule. They had stormed police barracks. They had taken arms and ammutions where such things were to be found. These, he said, were glorious deeds wrought by men everywhere in Ireland.

"But what have you done here?" he asked. "And what do you mean to do?"

Michael Murnihan spoke next. He said that he was ashamed of the men around him and of the club to which he belonged.

"It's a reproach to us," he said, "that we're the only men in Ireland that have done nothing. Are we ready to fight when the day for fighting comes? We are not. For what arms have we among us? Only two revolvers. Two revolvers, and that's all. Not a gun, though you know well, and I know, that there's plenty of guns round about us in the hands of men that are enemies to Ireland. I could name twenty houses in the locality where there are guns, and good guns, and you could name as many more. Why don't we go and take them? Are we cowards?"

The men around him shouted angrily that they were no cowards. Denis Ryan, excited and intensely moved, shouted with the rest. It seemed to him that an intolerable reproach lay on him and all of them.

"What's to hinder us going out to-night?" said Murnihan. "Why shouldn't we take the guns that ought to be in our hands and not in the hands of men who'd use them against us? All of you that are in favour of going out to-night will hold up your hands."

There was a moment's silence. None of the men present had ever taken part in any deed of violence, had ever threatened human life or openly and flagrantly broken the law. The delegate from Dublin, standing near Murnihan, looked round at the faces of the men. There was a cool, contemptuous smile in his lips.

"Perhaps," he said, "you'd rather not do it. Perhaps you'd rather go away and tell the police that I'm here with you. They'll be glad of the information. You'll get a reward, I dare say. Anyhow, you'll be safe."

Stung by his reproach, the young men raised their hands one after another. Denis Ryan raised his, though it trembled when he held it up.

"So we're all agreed," said Murnihan. "Then we'll do it to-night. Where will we go first?"

There was no lack of suggestions. The men knew the locality in which they lived and knew the houses where there were arms. Sporting guns in many houses, revolvers in some, rifles in one or two.

"There's a service rifle in Drennan's," said Murnihan, "that belonged to that nephew of his that was out in France, fighting for the English, and there's a double-barrelled shot gun there, too."

"Drennan is no friend of ours," said a man. "He was always an enemy of Ireland."

"And Drennan's away at the fair of Ballyruddery, with his bullocks," said another. "There'll be nobody in the house—only his wife and daughter. They'll not be able to interfere with us."

Murnihan asked for ten volunteers. Every man in the room, except Denis Ryan, crowded round him, offering to go.

"Eight will be enough," said Murnihan. "Two to keep watch on the road, two to keep the women quiet, and four to search the house for arms."

He looked round as he spoke. His eyes rested distrustfully on Denis Ryan, who stood by himself apart from the others. In secret societies and among revolutionaries, a man who appears anything less than enthusiastic must be regarded with suspicion.

"Are you coming with us, Denis Ryan?" asked Murnihan.

There was silence in the room for a minute. All eyes were fixed on Denis. There was not a man in the room who did not know how things were between him and Mary Drennan. There was not one who did not feel that Denis' faithfulness was doubtful. And each man realised that his own safety, perhaps his own life, depended on the entire fidelity of all his fellows. Denis felt the sudden suspicion. He saw in the faces around him the merciless cruelty which springs from fear. But he said nothing. It was the delegate from Dublin who broke the silence. He too, seemed to understand the situation. He realised, at all events, that for some reason this one man was unwilling to take part in the raid. He pointed his finger at Denis.

"That man," he said, "must go, and must take a leading part!"

So, and not otherwise, could they make sure of one who might be a traitor.

"I'm willing to go," said Denis. "I'm not wanting to hang back."

Murnihan drew two revolvers from his pocket. He handed one of them to Denis.

"You'll stand over the old woman with that pointed at her head," he said. "The minute we enter the house we'll call to her to put her hands up, and if she resists you'll shoot. But there'll be no need of shooting. She'll stand quiet enough!"

Denis stepped back, refusing to take the revolver.

"Do it yourself, Murnihan," he said, "if it has to be done!"

"I'm not asking you to do what I'm not going to do myself. I'm taking the other revolver, and I'll keep the girl quiet!"

"But—but," said Denis, stammering, "I'm not accustomed to guns. I've never had a revolver in my hand in my life. I'm —I'm afraid of it!"

He spoke the literal truth. He had never handled firearms of any sort, and a revolver in the hands of an inexperienced man is of all weapons the most dangerous. Nevertheless, with Murnihan's eye upon him, with the ring of anxious, threatening faces round him, he took the revolver.

An hour later, eight men walked quietly up to the Drennan's house. They wore black masks. Their clothes and figures were rudely but sufficiently disguised with wisps of hay tied to their arms and legs. Two of them carried revolvers. At the gate of the rough track which leads from the high road to the farmhouse the party halted. There was a whispered word of command. Two men detached themselves and stood as sentries on the road. Six men, keeping in the shadow of the trees, went forward to the house. A single light gleamed in one of the windows. Murnihan knocked

at the door. There was no response. He knocked again. The light moved from the window through which it shone, and disappeared. Once more Murnihan knocked. A woman's voice was heard.

"Who's there at this time of night?"

"In the name of the Irish Republic, open the door!" said Murnihan. "Open, or I'll break it down!"

"You may break it if you please!" It was Mrs. Drennan who spoke. "But I'll not open to thieves and murderers!"

The door of an Irish farmhouse is a frail thing ill-calculated to withstand assault. Murnihan flung himself against it, and it yielded. He stepped into the kitchen with his revolver in his hand. Denis Ryan was beside him. Behind him were the other four men pressing in. In the chimney nook, in front of the still glowing embers of the fire, were Mrs. Drennan and her daughter. Mary stood, fearlessly, holding a candle in a steady hand. Mrs. Drennan was more than fearless. She was defiant. She had armed herself with a long-handled hay-fork, which she held before her threatingly, as a soldier holds a rifle with a bayonet fixed.

"Put up your hands and stand still," said Murnihan, "both of you!"

"Put up your hands!" said Denis, and he pointed the revolver at Mrs. Drennan.

The old woman was undaunted.

"You murdering blackguards!" she shouted. "Would you shoot a woman?"

Then she rushed at him, thrusting with the hay-fork. Denis stepped back, and back again, until he stood in the doorway. One of the sharp prongs of the hay-fork grazed his hand, and slipped up his arm tearing his skin. Involuntarily, his hand clutched the revolver. His forefinger tightened on the trigger. There was a sharp explosion. The hay-fork dropped from Mrs. Drennan's hand. She flung her arms up, half turned, and then collapsed, all crumpled up, to the ground.

Mary Drennan sprang forward and bent over her.

There was dead silence in the room. The men stood horrow-stricken, mute, helpless. They had intended—God knows what. To fight for liberty! To establish an Irish Republic! To prove themselves brave patriots! They had not intended this. The dead woman lay on the floor before their eyes, her daughter bent over her. Denis Ryan stood for a moment staring wildly, the hand which held the revolver hanging limp. Then he slowly raised his other hand and held it before his eyes.

Mary Drennan moaned.

"We'd better clear out of this!" said Murnihan. He spoke in a low tone, and his voice trembled.

"Clear out of this, all of you!" he said. "And get home as quick as you can. Go across the fields, not by the roads!"

The men stole out of the house. Only Denis and Murnihan were left, and Mary Drennan, and the dead woman. Murnihan took Denis by the arm and dragged him towards the door. Denis shook him off. He turned to where Mary kneeled on the ground. He tore the mask from his face and flung it down.

"Oh, Mary, Mary!" he said. "I never meant it!"

The girl looked up. For an instant her eyes met his. Then she bent forward again across her mother's body. Murnihan grasped Denis again.

"You damned fool!" he said. "Do you want to hang for it? Do you want us all to hang for this night's work?"

He dragged him from the house. With his arm round the waist of the shuddering man he pulled him along from field to field until they reached a by-road which led into the town.

. . . . . .

Three days later Inspector Chalmers, of the Royal Irish Constabulary, and Major Whiteley, the magistrate, sat together in the office of the police barrack stations.

"I've got the men who did it," said Chalmers. "I've got the whole eight of

them, and I can lay my hands on all the rest of their cursed club any minute I like."

"Have you any evidence?" asked Whiteley. "Any evidence on which to convict?"

"I've no evidence worth speaking of," said Chalmers, "unless the girl can identify them. But I know I've got the right men."

"The girl won't know them," said Whiteley. "They're sure to have worn masks. And even if she did recognise one of them she'd be afraid to speak. In the state this country's in every one is afraid to speak."

"The girl won't be afraid," said Chalmers. "I know her father, and I knew her mother that's dead, and I know the girl. There never was a Drennan yet that was afraid to speak. I've sent the sergeant to fetch her. She ought to be here in a few minutes, and then you'll see if she's afraid."

Ten minutes later Mary Drennan was shown into the room by the police-sergeant. The two men who were waiting for her received her kindly.

"Sit down, Miss Drennan!" said Major Whiteley. "I'm very sorry to trouble you, and I'm very sorry to have to ask you to speak about a matter which must be painful to you. But I want you to tell me, as well as you can recollect, exactly what happened on the night your mother was murdered."

Mary Drennan, white faced and wretched,

told her story as she had told it before to the police-officer. She said that her father was absent from home, taking bullocks to the fair, that she and her mother sat up late, that they went to bed together about eleven o'clock. She spoke in emotionless, even tones, even when she told how six men had burst into the kitchen.

"Could you recognise any of them?" said Major Whiteley.

"I could not. They wore masks, and had hay tied over their clothes."

She told about her mother's defiance, about the scuffle, about the firing of the shot. Then she stopped short. Of what happened afterwards she had said nothing to the police-officer, but Major Whiteley questioned her.

"Did any of the men speak? Did you know their voices?"

"One spoke," she said, "but I did not know the voice."

"Did you get any chance of seeing their faces, or any of their faces?"

"The man who fired the shot took off his mask before he left the room, and I saw his face."

"Ah!" said Major Whiteley. "And would you recognise him if you saw him again?"

He leaned forward eagerly as he asked the question. All depended on her answer.

"Yes," said Mary. "I should know him if I saw him again."

Major Whiteley leaned across to Mr. Chalmers, who sat beside him.

"If you've got the right man," he whispered, "we'll hang him on the girl's evidence."

"I've got the right man, sure enough," said Chalmers.

"Miss Drennan," said Major Whiteley, "I shall have eight men brought into this room one after another, and I shall ask you to identify the man who fired a shot at your mother, the man who removed his mask before he left the room."

He rang the bell which stood on the table. The sergeant opened the door, and stood at attention. Mr. Chalmers gave his orders.

"Bring the prisoners into the room one by one," he said, "and stand each man there"—he pointed to a place opposite the window—"so that the light will fall full on his face."

Inspector Chalmers had not boasted foolishly when he said that he had taken the right men. Acting on such knowledge as the police possess in every country, he had arrested the leading members of the Sinn Fein Club. Of two of them he was surer than he was of any of the others. Murnihan was secretary of the club, and the most influential member of it. Denis Ryan had gone about the town looking like a

man stricken with a deadly disease ever since the night of the murder. The lawyer who employed him as a clerk complained that he seemed totally incapable of doing his work. The police felt sure that either he or Murnihan fired the shot; that both of them, and probably a dozen men besides, knew who did.

Six men were led into the office one after another. Mary Drennan looked at each of them and shook her head. It came to Murnihan's turn. He marched in defiantly, staring insolently at the police-officer and at the magistrate. He displayed no emotion when he saw Mary Drennan. She looked at him, and once more shook her head.

"Are you sure?" said Chalmers. "Quite sure?"

"I am sure," she said. "He is not the man I saw."

"Remove him," said Chalmers.

Murnihan stood erect for a moment before he turned to follow the sergeant. With hand raised to the salute he made profession of the faith that was in him:

"Up the rebels!" he said. "Up Sinn Fein! God save Ireland!"

Denis Ryan was led in and set in the appointed place. He stood there trembling. His face was deadly pale. The fingers of his hands twitched. His head was bowed. Only once did he raise his eyes and let them

rest for a moment on Mary's face. It was as if he was trying to convey some message to her, to make her understand something which he dared not say.

She looked at him steadily. Her face had been white before. Now colour, like a blush, covered her cheeks. Chalmers leaned forward eagerly, waiting for her to speak or give some sign. Major Whiteley tapped his fingers nervously on the table before him.

"That is not the man," said Mary Drennan.

"Look again," said Chalmers. "Make no mistake."

She turned to him and spoke calmly, quietly:

"I am quite certain. That is not the man."

"Damn!" said Chalmers. "The girl has failed us, after all. Take him away, sergeant!"

Denis Ryan had covered his face with his hands when Mary spoke. He turned to follow the sergeant from the room, a man bent and beaten down with utter shame.

"Stop!" said Chalmers. He turned fiercely to Mary. "Will you swear—will you take your oath he is not the man?"

"I swear it," said Mary.

"You're swearing to a lie," said Chalmers, "and you know it."

Major Whiteley was cooler and more courteous.

"Thank you, Miss Drennan," he said. "We need not trouble you any further."

Mary Drennan rose, bowed to the two men, and left the room.

"You may let those men go, Chalmers," said Major Whiteley quietly. "There's no evidence against them, and you can't convict them."

"I must let them go," said Chalmers. "But they're the men who were there, and the last of them, Denis Ryan, fired the shot."

Mary Drennan never met her lover again, but she wrote to him once before he left the country.

"You see how I loved you, Denis. I gave you your life. I bought it for you, and my soul was the price I paid for it when I swore to a lie and was false to my mother's memory. I loved you that much, Denis, but I shall never speak to you again."

PART II

PART II

IX

A BIRD IN HAND

KONRAD KARL II. lost his crown and became a king in exile when Megalia became a republic. He was the victim of an ordinary revolution which took place in 1913, and was, therefore, in no way connected with the great war. Konrad Karl was anxious that this fact should be widely known. He did not wish to be mistaken for a member of the group of royalties who came to grief through backing the Germanic powers.

Like many other dethroned kings he made his home in England. He liked London life and prided himself on his mastery of the English language, which he spoke fluently, using slang and colloquial phrases whenever he could drag them in. He was an amiable and friendly young man, very generous when he had any money and entirely free from that pride and exclusiveness which is the fault of many European kings. He would have been a popular member of

English society if it had not been for his connection with Madame Corinne Ypsilante, a lady of great beauty but little reputation. The king, who was sincerely attached to her, could never be induced to see that a lady of that kind must be kept in the background. Indeed it would not have been easy to conceal Madame Ypsilante. She was a lady who showed up wherever she went, and she went everywhere with the king. English society could neither ignore nor tolerate her. So English society, a little regretfully, dropped King Konrad Karl.

He did not much regret the loss of social position. He and Madame lived very comfortably in a suite of rooms at Beaufort's, which, as every one knows, is the most luxurious and most expensive hotel in London. Their most intimate friend was Mr. Michael Gorman, M.P. for Upper Offaly. He was a broad-minded man with no prejudice against ladies like Madame Ypsilante. He had a knowledge of the by-ways of finance which made him very useful to the king; for Konrad Karl, though he lived in Beaufort's Hotel, was by no means a rich man. The Crown revenues of Megalia, never very large, were seized by the Republic at the time of the revolution, and the king had no private fortune. He succeeded in carrying off the Crown jewels when he left the country; but his departure was so hurried

that he carried off nothing else. His tastes were expensive, and Madame Ypsilante was a lady of lavish habits. The Crown jewels of Megalia did not last long. It was absolutely necessary for the king to earn, or otherwise acquire, money from time to time, and Michael Gorman was as good as any man in London at getting money in irregular ways.

It was Gorman, for instance, who started the Near Eastern Wine Growers' Association. It prospered for a time because it was the only limited liability company which had a king on its Board of Directors. It failed in the end because the wine was so bad that nobody could drink it. It was Gorman who negotiated the sale of the Island of Salissa to a wealthy American. Madame Ypsilante got her famous pearl necklace out of the price of the island. It was partly because the necklace was very expensive that King Konrad Karl found himself short of money again within a year of the sale of the island. The moment was a particularly unfortunate one. Owing to the war it was impossible to start companies or sell islands.

Things came to a crisis when Emile, the Bond Street dressmaker, refused to supply Madame with an evening gown which she particularly wanted. It was a handsome garment, and Madame was ready to promise to pay £100

for it. Mr. Levinson, the business manager of Emile's, said that further credit was impossible, when Madame's bill already amounted to £630. His position was, perhaps, reasonable. It was certainly annoying. Madame, after a disagreeable interview with him, returned to Beaufort's Hotel in a very bad temper.

Gorman was sitting with the king when she stormed into the room. Her's was one of those simple untutored natures which make little attempt to conceal emotion. She flung her muff into a corner of the room. She tore the sable stole from her shoulders and sent it whirling towards the fireplace. Gorman was only just in time to save it from being burnt. She dragged a long pin from her hat and brandished it as if it had been a dagger.

"Konrad," she said, "I demand that at once the swine-dog be killed and cut into small bits by the knives of executioners."

There was a large china jar standing on the floor near the fireplace, one of those ornaments which give their tone of sumptuousness to the rooms in Beaufort's Hotel. Madame rushed at it and kicked it. When it broke she trampled on the pieces. She probably wished to show the size of the bits into which the business manager of Emile's ought to be minced.

Gorman sought a position of safety be-

hind a large table. He had once before seen Madame deeply moved and he felt nervous. The king, who was accustomed to her ways, spoke soothingly.

"My beloved Corinne," he said, "who is he, this pig? Furnish me forthwith by return with an advice note of the name of the defendant."

The king's business and legal experience had taught him some useful phrases, which he liked to air when he could; but his real mastery of the English language was best displayed by his use of current slang.

"We shall at once," he went on, "put him up the wind, or is it down the wind? Tell me, Gorman. No. Do not tell me. I have it. We will put the wind up him."

"If possible," said Gorman.

Madame turned on him.

"Possible!" she said. "It is possible to kill a rat. Possible! Is not Konrad a king?"

"Even kings can't cut people up in that sort of way," said Gorman, "especially just now when the world is being made safe for democracy. Still if you tell us who the man is we'll do what we can to him."

"He is a toad, an ape, a cur-cat with mange, that manager of Emile's," said Madame. "He said to me 'no, I make no evening gown for Madame.'"

"Wants to be paid, I suppose," said

Gorman. "They sometimes do."

"Alas, Corinne," said the king, "and if I give him a cheque the bank will say 'Prefer it in a drawer.' They said it last time. Or perhaps it was 'Refer it to a drawer.' I do not remember. But that is what the bank will do. Gorman, my friend, it is as the English say all O.K. No, that is what it is not. It is U.P. Well. I have lived. I am a King. There is always poison. I can die. Corinne, farewell."

The king drew himself up to his full height, some five foot six, and looked determined.

"Don't talk rot," said Gorman. "You are not at the end of your tether yet."

The king maintained his heroic pose for a minute. Then he sat down on a deep chair and sank back among the cushions.

"Gorman," he said, "you are right. It is rot, what you call dry rot, to die. And there is more tether, perhaps. You say so, and I trust you, my friend. But where is it, the tether beyond the end?"

Madame, having relieved her feelings by breaking the china jar to bits, suddenly became gentle and pathetic. She flung herself on to the floor at Gorman's feet and clasped his knees.

"You are our friend," she said, "now and always. Oh Gorman, Sir Gorman, M.P., drag out more tether so that my Konrad does not die."

Gorman disliked emotional scenes very much. He persuaded Madame to sit on a chair instead of the floor. He handed her a cigarette. The king, who understood her thoroughly, sent for some liqueur brandy and filled a glass for her.

"Now," he said, "Trot up, cough out, tell on, Gorman. Where is the tether which has no end? How am I to raise the dollars, shekels, oof? You have a plan, Gorman. Make it work."

"My plan," said Gorman, "ought to work. I don't say it's a gold mine, but there's certainly money in it. I came across a man yesterday called Bilkins, who's made a pile, a very nice six figure pile out of eggs—contracts, you know, war prices, food control and all the usual ramp."

"Alas," said the king, "I have no eggs, not one. I cannot ramp."

"I don't expect you to try," said Gorman. "As a matter of fact I don't think the thing could be done twice. Bilkins only just pulled it off. My idea—"

"I see it," said Madame. "We invite the excellent Bilkins to dinner. We are gay. He and we. There is a little game with cards. Konrad and I are more than a match for Bilkins. That is it, Gorman. It goes."

"That's not it in the least," said Gorman. "Bilkins isn't that kind of man at all. He's

a rabid teetotaller for one thing, and he's extremely religious. He wouldn't play for anything bigger than a sixpence, and you'd spend a year taking a ten-pound note off him."

"Hell and the devil, Gorman," said the king, "if I have no eggs to ramp and if Bilkins will not play—"

"Wait a minute," said Gorman, "I told you that Bilkins' egg racket was a bit shady. He wasn't actually prosecuted; but his character wants white-washing, badly, and the man knows it."

The king sighed heavily.

"Alas, Gorman," he said, "it would be of no use for us to wash Bilkins. Corinne and I, if we tried to washwhite, that is, I should say, to whitewash, the man afterwards would be only more black. We are not respectable, Corinne and I. It is no use for Bilkins to come to us."

"That's so," said Gorman. "I don't suppose a certificate from me would be much good either. Bilkins' own idea—he feels his position a good deal—is that if he could get a title—knighthood for instance—or even an O.B.E., it would set him up again; but they won't give him a thing. He has paid handsomely into the best advertised charities and showed me the receipts himself—and handed over £10,000 to the party funds, giving £5,000 to each

party to make sure; and now he feels he's been swindled. They won't do it—can't, I suppose. The eggs were too fishy."

"I should not care," said the king, "if all the eggs were fishes. If I were a party and could get £5,000. But I am not a party, Gorman, I am a king."

"Exactly," said Gorman, "and it's kings who give those things, the things Bilkins wants. Isn't there a Megalian Order—Pink Vulture or something?"

"Gorman, you have hit it," said the king delightedly. "You have hit the eye of the bull, and the head of the nail. I can give an order, I can say 'Bilkins, you are Grand Knight of the Order of the Pink Vulture of Megalia, First Class.' Gorman, it is done. I give. Bilkins pays. The world admires the honourableness of the Right Honourable Sir Bilkins. His character is washed white. Ah, Corinne, my beloved, you shall spit in the face of the manager of Emile's. I said I cannot ramp. I have no eggs. I was wrong. The Vulture of Megalia lays an egg for Bilkins."

"You've got the idea," said Gorman. "But we can't rush the thing. Your Pink Vulture is all right, of course. I'm not saying anything against it. But most people in this country have never heard of it, and consequently it wouldn't be of much use to a man of Bilkin's position. The first

thing we've got to do is to advertise the fowl; get it fluttering before the public eye. If you leave that part to me I'll manage it all right. I've been connected with the press for years."

Three days later it was announced in most of the London papers that the King of Megalia had bestowed the Order of the Pink Vulture on Sir Bland Potterton, His Majesty's Minister for Balkan Affairs, in recognition of his services to the Allied cause in the Near East. Sir Bland Potterton was in Roumania when the announcement appeared and he did not hear of his new honour for nearly three weeks. When he did hear of it he refused it curtly.

In the meanwhile the Order was bestowed on two Brigadier Generals and three Colonels, all on active service in remote parts of the world. Little pictures of the star and ribbon of the Order appeared in the back pages of illustrated papers, and there were short articles in the Sunday papers which gave a history of the Order, describing it as the most ancient in Europe, and quoting the names of eminent men who had won the ribbon of the Order in times past. The Duke of Wellington, Lord Nelson, William the Silent, Galileo, Christopher Columbus, and the historian Gibbon appeared on the list. The Order was next bestowed on an Admiral, who held a command in the South

Pacific, and on M. Clemenceau.

After that Gorman dined with the King.

The dinner, as is always the case in Beaufort's Hotel, was excellent. The wine was good. Madame Ypsilante wore a dress which, as she explained, was more than three months old. Emile, it appeared, was still pressing for payment of the bill and refused to supply any more clothes. However, neither age nor custom had staled the splendour of the purple velvet gown and the jewellery—Madame Ypsilante always wore a great deal of jewellery—was dazzling.

The king seemed a little uneasy, and after dinner spoke to Gorman about the Megalian Order of the Pink Vulture.

"You are magnificent, Gorman," he said, "and your English press! Ah, my friend, if you had been Prime Minister in Megalia, and if there had been newspapers, I might to-day be sitting on the throne, though I do not want to, not at all. The throne of Megalia is what you call a hot spot. But my friend, is it wise? There must be someone who knows that the Pink Vulture of Megalia is not an antique. It is, as the English say, mid-Victorian. 1865, Gorman. That is the date; and someone will know that."

"I daresay," said Gorman, "that there may be two or three people who know; but they haven't opened their mouths so

far and before they do we ought to have Bilkin's cheque safe."

"How much?" said Madame. "That is the thing which matters."

"After he's read the list of distinguished men who held the order in the past and digested the names of all the generals and people who've just been given it, we may fairly expect £5,000. We'll screw him up a bit if we can, but we won't take a penny less. Considering the row there'll be afterwards, when Bilkins finds out, we ought to get £10,000. It will be most unpleasant, and it's bound to come. Most of the others will refuse the Order as soon as they hear they've been given it, and Bilkins will storm horribly and say he has been swindled, not that there is any harm in swindling Bilkins. After that egg racket of his he deserves to be swindled. Still it won't be nice to have to listen to him."

"Bah!" said Madame, "we shall have the cash."

"And it was not I," said the king, "who said that the Duke of Wellington wore the Pink Vulture. It was not Corinne. It was not you, Gorman. It was the newspapers. When Bilkins comes to us we say 'Bah! Go to *The Times*, Sir Bilkins, go to *The Daily Mail*,' There is no more for Bilkins to say then."

"One comfort," said Gorman, "is that

he can't take a legal action of any kind."

Their fears were, as it turned out, unfounded. Bilkins, having paid, not £5,000 but £6,000, for the Megalian Order, was not anxious to advertise the fact that he had made a bad bargain. Indeed he may be said to have got good value for his money. He has not many opportunities of wearing the ribbon and the star; but he describes himself on his visiting cards and at the head of his business note paper as "Sir Timothy Bilkins, K.C.O.P.V.M." Nobody knows what the letters stand for, and it is generally believed that Bilkins has been knighted in the regular way for services rendered to the country during the war. The few who remember his deal in eggs are forced to suppose that the stories told about that business at the time were slander. Lady Bilkins, who was present at the ceremony of investure, often talks of the "dear King and Queen of Megalia." Madame Ypsilante can, when she chooses, look quite like a real queen.

X

THE EMERALD PENDANT

EVEN as a schoolboy, Bland Potterton was fussy and self-important. At the university—Balliol was his college—he was regarded as a coming man, likely to make his mark in the world. This made him more fussy and more self-important. When he became a recognised authority on Near Eastern affairs he became pompous and more fussy than ever. His knighthood, granted in 1913, and an inevitable increase of waist measurement emphasised his pompousness without diminishing his fussiness. When the craze for creating new departments of state was at its height, Bland-Potterton, then Sir Bartholomew, was made Head of the Ministry for Balkan Affairs. It was generally felt that the right man had been put into the right place. Sir Bartholomew looked like a Minister, talked like a Minister, and, what is more important, felt like a Minister. Indeed he felt like a Cabinet Minister, though he had not yet obtained that rank. Sir Bartholomew's return from Roumania was duly

advertised in the newspapers. Paragraphs appeared every day for a week hinting at a diplomatic coup which would effect the balance of power in the Balkans and materially shorten the war. Gorman, who knew Sir Bartholomew well, found a good deal of entertainment in the newspaper paragraphs. He had been a journalist himself for many years. He understood just whom the paragraphs came from and how they got into print. He was a little surprised, but greatly interested, when he received a note from Sir Bartholomew.

"My dear Mr. Gorman," he read, "Can you make it convenient to lunch with me one day next week? Shall we say in my room in the office of the Ministry—the Feodora Hotel, Piccadilly—at 1.30 p.m. There is a matter of some importance—of considerable national importance—about which we are most anxious to obtain your advice and your help. Will you fix the earliest possible day? The condition of the Near East demands—urgently demands—our attention. I am, my dear Mr. Gorman, yours etc. . ."

Gorman without hesitation fixed Monday which is the earliest day in any week except Sunday, and he did not suppose that the offices of the Ministry of Balkan Affairs would be open on Sunday.

It is not true, though it is frequently said, that Sir Bartholomew retained the

services of the chef of the Feodora Hotel when he took over the building for the use of his Ministry. It is well known that Sir Bartholomew—in his zeal for the public service—often lunched in his office and sometimes invited men whom he wanted to see on business, to lunch with him. They reported that the meals they ate were uncommonly good, as the meals of a Minister of State certainly ought to be. It was no doubt, in this way that the slanderous story about the chef arose and gained currency. Gorman did not believe it, because he knew that the Feodora chef had gone to Beaufort's Hotel when the other was taken over by the Government. But Gorman fully expected a good luncheon, nicely served in one of the five rooms set apart for Sir Bartholomew's use in the hotel.

He was not disappointed. The sole was all that any one could ask. The salmi which followed it was good, and even the Feodora chef could not have sent up a better rum omelette.

Sir Bartholomew was wearing a canary coloured waistcoat with mother-of-pearl buttons. It seemed to Gorman that the expanse of yellow broadened as luncheon went on. Perhaps it actually did. Perhaps an atmosphere of illusion was created by the port which followed an excellent bottle of sauterne. Yellow is a cheerful

colour, and Sir Bartholomew's waistcoat increased the vague feeling of hopeful well-being which the luncheon produced.

"Affairs in the Near East," said Sir Bartholomew, "are at present in a critical position."

"Always are, aren't they?" said Gorman. "Some affairs are like that, Irish affairs for instance."

Sir Bartholomew frowned slightly. He hated levity. Then the good wine triumphing over the dignity of the bureaucrat, he smiled again.

"You Irishmen!" he said. "No subject is serious for you. That is your great charm. But I assure you, Mr. Gorman, that we are at this moment passing through a crisis."

"If there's anything I can do to help you—" said Gorman. "A crisis is nothing to me. I have lived all my life in the middle of one. That's the worst of Ireland. Crisis is her normal condition."

"I think——" Sir Bartholomew lowered his voice although there was no one in the room to overhear him. "I think, Mr. Gorman, that you are acquainted with the present King of Megalia."

"If you mean Konrad Karl," said Gorman, "I should call him the late king. They had a revolution there, you know, and hunted him out. I believe Megalia is a republic *now*."

"None of the Great Powers," said Sir Bartholomew, "has ever recognised the Republic of Megalia."

He spoke as if what he said disposed of the Megalians finally. The front of his yellow waistcoat expanded when he mentioned the Great Powers. This was only proper. A man who speaks with authority about Great Powers ought to swell a little.

"The Megalian people," he went on, "have hitherto preserved a strict neutrality."

"So the king gave me to understand," said Gorman. "He says his late subjects go about and plunder their neighbours impartially. They don't mind a bit which side anybody is on so long as there is a decent chance of loot."

"The Megalians," said Sir Bartholomew, "are a fighting race, and in the critical position of Balkan Affairs—a delicate equipoise—" He seemed taken with the phrase for he repeated it—"A remarkably delicate equipoise—the intervention of the Megalian Army would turn the scale and—I feel certain—decide the issue. All that is required to secure the action of the Megalians is the presence in the country of a leader, some one whom the people know and recognise, some one who can appeal to the traditional loyalty of a chivalrous race, in short—"

"You can't be thinking of the late king?"

said Gorman. "They're not the least loyal to him. They deposed him, you know. In fact by his account—I wasn't there myself at the time—but he told me that they tried to hang him. He says that if they ever catch him they certainly will hang him. He doesn't seem to have hit it off with them."

Sir Bartholomew waved these considerations aside.

"An emotional and excitable people," he said, "but, believe me, Mr. Gorman, warm-hearted, and capable of devotion to a trusted leader. They will rally round the king, if—"

"I'm not at all sure," said Gorman, "that the king will care about going there to be rallied round. It's a risk, whatever you say."

"I appreciate that point," said Sir Bartholomew. "Indeed it is just because I appreciate it so fully that I am asking for your advice and help, Mr. Gorman. You know the king. You are, I may say, his friend."

"Pretty nearly the only friend he has," said Gorman.

"Exactly. Now I, unfortunately—I fear that the king rather dislikes me."

"You weren't at all civil to him when he offered you the Order of the Pink Vulture; but I don't think he has any grudge against you on that account. He's not the sort of

man who bears malice. The real question is—what is the king to get out of it? What are you offering him?"

"The Allies," said Sir Bartholomew, "would recognise him as the King of Megalia, and—er—of course, support him."

"I don't think he'd thank you for that," said Gorman, "but you can try him if you like."

Sir Bartholomew, on reflection, was inclined to agree with Gorman. Mere recognition, though agreeable to any king, is unsubstantial, and the support suggested was evidently doubtful.

"What else?" He spoke in a very confidential tone. "What other inducement would you suggest our offering? We are prepared to go a long way—to do a good deal—"

"Unfortunately for you," said Gorman, "the king is pretty well off at present. He got £6,000 three weeks ago out of Bilkins—the man who ran the egg swindle—and until that's spent he won't feel the need of money. If you could wait six weeks—I'm sure he'll be on the rocks again in six weeks—and then offer a few thousand—"

"But we can't wait," said Sir Bartholomew. "Affairs in the Near East are most critical. Unless the Megalian Army acts at once— "

"In that case," said Gorman, "the only

thing for you to do is to try Madame Ypsilante."

"That woman!" said Sir Bartholomew. "I really cannot— You must see, Mr. Gorman, that for a man in my position—"

"Is there a Lady Bland-Potterton?" said Gorman. "I didn't know."

"I'm not married," said Sir Bartholomew. "When I speak of my position—I mean my position as a member of the Government—"

"Madame has immense influence with the king," said Gorman.

"Yes. Yes. But the woman—the—er—lady has no recognised status. She—"

"Just at present," said Gorman, "she is tremendously keen on emeralds. She has got a new evening dress from Emile and there's nothing she wants more than an emerald pendant to wear with it. I'm sure she'd do her best to persuade the king to go back to Megalia if—"

"But I don't think—" said Sir Bartholomew. "Really, Mr. Gorman—"

"I'm not suggesting that you should pay for it yourself," said Gorman. "Charge it up against the Civil List or the Secret Service Fund, or work it in under 'Advances to our Allies.' There must be some way of doing it, and I really think it's your best chance."

Sir Bartholomew talked for nearly an

hour. He explained several times that it was totally impossible for him to negotiate with Madame Ypsilante. The idea of bribing her with an emerald pendant shocked him profoundly. But he was bent on getting King Konrad Karl to go back to Megalia. That seemed to him a matter of supreme importance for England, for Europe and the world. In the end, after a great deal of consultation, a plan suggested itself. Madame should have her emeralds sent to her anonymously. Gorman undertook to explain to her that she was expected, by way of payment for the emeralds, to persuade the king to go back to Megalia and once more occupy the throne. Sir Bartholomew Bland-Potterton would appear at the last moment as the accredited representative of the Allied Governments, and formally lay before the king the proposal for the immediate mobilisation of the Megalian army.

"I shall have a lot of work and worry," said Gorman, "and I'm not asking anything for myself; but if the thing comes off—"

"You can command the gratitude of the Cabinet," said Sir Bartholomew, "and anything they can do for you—an O.B.E., now, or even a knighthood—"

"No thank you," said Gorman, "but if you could see your way to starting a few munition works in Upper Offaly, my con-

stituency, you know. The people are getting discontented, and I'm not at all sure that they'll return me at the next election unless something is done for them now."

"You shall have an aeroplane factory," said Sir Bartholomew, "two in fact. I think I may safely promise two—and shells—would your people care for making shells?"

The plan worked out exceedingly well. The pendant which Madame Ypsilante received was very handsome. It contained fourteen stones of unusual size set in circles of small diamonds. She was delighted, and thoroughly understood what was expected of her. A Government engineer went down to Upper Offaly, and secured, at enormous expense, sites for three large factories. The men who leased the land were greatly pleased, everyone else looked forward to a period of employment at very high wages, and Gorman became very popular even among the extreme Sinn Feiners. Sir Bartholomew Bland-Potterton went about London, purring with satisfaction like a large cat, and promising sensational events in the Near East which would rapidly bring the war to an end. Only King Konrad Karl was a little sad.

"Gorman, my friend," he said, "I go back to that thrice damned country and I die. They will hang me by the neck until I am dead as a door mat."

"They may not," said Gorman. "You can't be certain."

"You do not know Megalia," said the king. "It is sure, Gorman, what you would call a dead shirt. But Corinne, my beloved Corinne, says 'Go. Be a king once more.' And I—I am a blackguard, Gorman. I know it. I am not respectable. I know it. But I am a lover. I am capable of a great passion. I wave my hand. I smile. I kiss Corinne. I face the tune of the band. I say 'Behold, damn it, and Great Scott!—at the bidding of Corinne, I die.'"

"If I were you," said Gorman, "I'd conscript every able-bodied man in the country directly I got there and put the entire lot into a front line trench. There won't be any one left to assassinate you then."

"Alas! There are the Generals and the Staff. It is not possible, Gorman, even in Megalia, to put the Staff into a trench, and that is enough. One General only and his Staff. They come to the palace. They say 'In the name of the Republic, so that the world may be safe for democracy—' and then—! There is a rope. There is a flag staff. I float in the air. They cheer. I am dead. I know it. But it is for Corinne. Good."

It was in this mood of chivalrous high romance that the king received Sir Bartholomew Bland-Potterton. Gorman was present

during the interview. He had made a special effort, postponing an important engagement, in order to hear what was said. He expected to be interested and amused. He was not disappointed.

Sir Bartholomew Bland-Potterton was at his very best. He made a long speech about the sacred cause of European civilization, and the supremely important part which the King of Megalia was called upon to play in securing victory and lasting peace. He also talked about the rights of small nationalities. King Konrad Karl rose to the same level of lofty sentiment in his reply. He went further than Sir Bartholomew for he talked about democracy in terms which were affectionate, a rather surprising thing for a monarch whose power, when he had it, was supposed to be absolute.

"I go," he said. "If necessary I offer up myself as a fatted calf, a sacrifice, a burnt ewe lamb upon the altar of liberty. I say to the people—to my people 'Damn it, cut off my head.' It's what they will do."

"Dear me," said Sir Bartholomew. "Dear me. I trust not. I hope not. You will have the support, the moral support, of all the Allies. I should be sorry to think —we should all be sorry—"

The king who, was standing in the middle of the hearthrug, struck a fine attitude, laying his hand on his breast.

"It will be as I say," he said. "Gorman knows. Corinne, though she says 'No, no, never,' she knows. The people of Megalia what are they? I will tell you. Butchers and pigs. Pork butchers. To them it is sport to kill a king. But you say 'Go,' and Gorman says 'Go.' And the cause of Europe says 'Go.' And Corinne she also. Good. The Prime Minister of Megalia trots out his hatchet. I say 'By Jove, here is my neck.'"

Sir Bartholomew Bland-Potterton was greatly affected. He even promised that a British submarine would patrol the Megalian coast with a view to securing the king's safety. He might perhaps have gone on to offer a squadron of aeroplanes by way of body-guard, but while he was speaking, Madame burst into the room.

She was evidently highly excited. Her face, beneath its coating of powder, was flushed. Her eyes were unusually bright. Her hair—a most unusual thing with her—appeared to be coming down. She rushed straight to the king and flung her arms round his neck.

"Konrad," she said, "my Konrad. You shall not go to Megalia. Never, never will I say 'Be a King.' Never shall you live with those so barbarous people. I said 'Go.' I admit it. I was wrong, my Konrad. Behold!"

She released the king from her embrace,

fumbled in her handbag and drew out a small leather case. She opened it, took out a magnificent looking pendant. She flung it on the ground and trampled on it. Gorman stepped forward to rescue the emeralds.

"Don't do that," he said. "Hang it all! Don't. Give the thing back if you like, but don't destroy it. Those stones must be immensely valuable."

"Valuable!" Madame's voice rose to a shriek. "What is valuable compared to the safety of my Konrad? Valuable? They are worth ten pounds. Ten pounds, Gorman! I took them to Goldstein to-day. He knows jewels, that Goldstein. He is expert and he said 'They are shams. They are worth—at most ten pounds.'"

Gorman stared for a moment at the stones which lay on the floor in their crushed setting. Then he turned to Sir Bartholomew.

"You don't mean to say," he said, "that you were such a d——d ass as to send Madame sham stones?"

Sir Bartholomew's face was a sufficient answer to the question. Gorman took him by the arm and led him out of the room without a word.

"You'd better go home," he said. "Madame Ypsilante is violent when roused, and it is not safe for you to stay. But how could you have been such an idiot—!"

"I never thought of her having the stones

valued," said Sir Bartholomew.

"Of course she had them valued," said Gorman. "Anyone else in the world would have known that she'd be sure to have them valued. Of all the besotted imbeciles—And they call you a statesman!"

Sir Bartholomew, having got safely into the street, began to recover a little, and attempted a defence of himself.

"But," he said, "a pendant like that—emeralds of that size are enormously expensive. The Government would not have sanctioned it. After all, Mr. Gorman, we are bound to be particularly careful about the expenditure of public funds. It is one of the proudest traditions of British statesmanship that it is scrupulously honourable even to the point of being niggardly in sanctioning the expenditure of the tax-payer's money."

"Good Lord!" said Gorman. "I didn't think—I really did not think that I could be surprised by anything in politics—But when you talk to me—You oughtn't to do it, Potterton. You really ought not. Public funds. Tax-payers' money. Scrupulously honourable, and—niggardly. Good Lord!"

XI

SETTLED OUT OF COURT

THERE are many solicitors in London who make larger incomes than Mr. Dane-Latimer, though he does very well and pays a considerable sum every year by way of super-tax. There are certainly solicitors with firmly established family practices, whose position is more secure than Mr. Dane-Latimer's. And there are some whose reputation stands higher in legal circles. But there is probably no solicitor whose name is better known all over the British Isles than Mr. Dane-Latimer's. He has been fortunate enough to become a kind of specialist in "Society" cases. No divorce suit can be regarded as really fashionable unless Mr. Dane-Latimer is acting in it for plaintiff, defendant, or co-respondent. A politician who has been libelled goes to Mr. Dane-Latimer for advice. An actress with a hopeful breach of promise case takes the incriminating letters to Mr. Dane-Latimer. He knows the facts of nearly every exciting scandal. He can fill in the gaps which the newspapers neces-

sarily leave even in stories which spread themselves over columns of print. What is still better, he can tell stories which never get into the papers at all, the stories of cases so thrilling that the people concerned settle them out of court.

It will easily be understood that Mr. Dane-Latimer is an interesting man to meet and that a good many people welcome the chance of a talk with him.

Gorman, who has a cultivated taste for gossip, was greatly pleased when Dane-Latimer sat down beside him one day in the smoking-room of his club. It was two o'clock, an hour at which the smoking-room is full of men who have lunched. Gorman knew that Dane-Latimer would not talk in an interesting way before a large audience, but he hoped to be able to keep him until most of the other men had left. He beckoned to the waitress and ordered two coffees and two liqueur brandies. Then he set himself to be as agreeable as possible to Dane-Latimer.

"Haven't seen you for a long time," he said. "What have you been doing? Had the flu?"

"Flu! No. Infernally busy, that's all."

"Really," said Gorman. "I should have thought the present slump would have meant rather a slack time for you. People—I mean the sort of people whose affairs you manage—can't be going it in quite the old

way, at all events not to the same extent."

Dane-Latimer poured half his brandy into his coffee cup and smiled. Gorman, who felt it necessary to keep the conversation going, wandered on.

"But perhaps they are. After all, these war marriages must lead to a good many divorces, though we don't read about them as much as we used to. But I dare say they go on just the same and you have plenty to do."

Dane-Latimer grinned. He beckoned to the waitress and ordered two more brandies. Gorman talked on. One after another the men in the smoking-room got up and went away. At three o'clock there was no one left within earshot of Gorman and Dane-Latimer. A couple of Heads of Government Departments and a Staff Officer still sat on at the far end of the room, but they were busy with a conversation of their own about a new kind of self-starter for motor cars. Dane-Latimer began to talk at last.

"The fact is," he said, "I shouldn't have been here to-day—I certainly shouldn't be sitting smoking at this hour if I hadn't wanted to talk to you."

Gorman chuckled pleasantly. He felt that something interesting was coming.

"I've rather a queer case on hand," said Dane-Latimer, "and some friends of yours are mixed up in it, at least I think I'm right

in saying that that picturesque blackguard Konrad Karl of Megalia is a friend of yours."

"I hope he's not the co-respondent," said Gorman.

"No. No. It's nothing of that sort. In fact, strictly speaking, he's not in it at all. No legal liability. The action threatened is against Madame Ypsilante."

"Don't say shop lifting," said Gorman. "I've always been afraid she'd take to that sooner or later. Not that she's a dishonest woman. Don't think that. It's simply that she can't understand, is constitutionally incapable of seeing any reason why she shouldn't have anything she wants."

"You may make your mind easy," said Dane-Latimer. "It's not shop-lifting. In fact it isn't anything that would be called really disgraceful."

"That surprises me. I should hardly have thought Madame could have avoided—but go on."

"You know Scarsby?" said Dane-Latimer.

"I know a Mrs. Scarsby, a woman who advertises herself and her parties and pushes hard to get into the smartest set. She's invited me to one of her shows next week. Very seldom does now, though I used to go there pretty often. She has rather soared lately, higher circles than those I move in."

"That's the wife of the man I mean."

"Never knew she had a husband," said

Gorman. "She keeps him very dark. But that sort of woman often keeps her husband in the background. I suppose he exists simply to earn what she spends."

"That's it. He's a dentist. I rather wonder you haven't heard of him. He's quite at the top of the tree; the sort of dentist who charges two guineas for looking at your front tooth and an extra guinea if he tells you there's a hole in it."

"I expect he needs it all," said Gorman, "to keep Mrs. Scarsby going. But what the devil has he got to do with Madame Ypsilante. I can't imagine her compromising herself with a man whose own wife is ashamed to produce him."

Dane-Latimer smiled.

"I told you it was nothing of that sort," he said. "In fact it's quite the opposite. Madame went to him as a patient in the ordinary way, and he started to put a gold filling into one of her teeth. She was infernally nervous and made him swear beforehand that he wouldn't hurt her. She brought Konrad Karl with her and he held one of her hands. There was a sort of nurse, a woman whom Scarsby always has on the premises, who held her other hand. I mention this to show you that there were plenty of witnesses present, and it won't be any use denying the facts. Well, Scarsby went to work in the usual way with one of those

infernal drill things which they work with their feet. He had her right back in the chair and was standing more or less in front of her. He says he's perfectly certain he didn't hurt her in the least, but I think he must have got down to a nerve or something without knowing it. Anyhow Madame —she couldn't use her hands you know— gave a sort of twist, got her foot against his chest and kicked him clean across the room."

"I'd give five pounds to have been there," said Gorman.

"It must have been a funny sight. Scarsby clutched at everything as he passed. He brought down the drilling machine and a table covered with instruments in his fall. He strained his wrist and now he wants to take an action for a thousand pounds damages against Madame."

"Silly ass," said Gorman. "He might just as well take an action against me for a million. Madame hasn't got a thousand pence in the world."

"So I thought," said Dane-Latimer, "and so I told him. As a matter of fact I happen to know that Madame is pretty heavily in debt."

"Besides," said Gorman. "He richly deserved what he got. Any man who is fool enough to go monkeying about with Madame Ypsilante's teeth—you've seen her, I suppose."

"Oh, yes. Several times."

"Well then you can guess the sort of woman she is. And any one who had ever looked at her eyes would know. I'd just as soon twist a tiger's tail as try to drill a hole in one of Madame Ypsilante's teeth. Scarsby must have known there'd be trouble."

"I'm afraid the judge won't take that view," said Dane-Latimer, smiling.

"He ought to call it justifiable self-defence. He will too if he's ever had one of those drills in his own mouth."

"As a lawyer," said Dane-Latimer, "I'd like to see this action fought out. I don't remember a case quite like it, and it would be exceedingly interesting to see what view the Court would take. But of course I'm bound to work for my client's interest, and I'm advising Scarsby to settle it if he can. He's in a vile temper and there's no doubt he really is losing money through not being able to work with his strained wrist. Still, if Madame, or the king on her behalf, would make any sort of offer—She may not have any money, Gorman, but everybody knows she has jewellery."

"Do you really think," said Gorman, "that Madame will sell her pearls to satisfy the claims of a dentist who, so far as I can make out, didn't even finish stopping her tooth for her?"

"The law might make her."

"The law couldn't," said Gorman. "You know perfectly well that if the law tried she'd simply say that her jewellery belonged to King Konrad and you've no kind of claim on him."

"That's so," said Dane-Latimer. "All the same it won't be very nice if the case comes into court. Madame had far better settle it. Just think of the newspapers. They'll crack silly jokes about it for weeks and there'll be pictures of Madame in most undignified attitudes. She won't like it."

"I see that," said Gorman. "And of course Konrad Karl will be dragged in and made to look like a fool."

"Kings, of all people," said Dane-Latimer, "can't afford to be laughed at. It doesn't do a king any real harm if he's hated, but if once he becomes comic he's done."

Gorman thought the matter over for a minute or two.

"I'll tell you what," he said at last. "You hold the dentist in play for a day or two and I'll see what I can do. There'll be no money. I warn you fairly of that. You won't even get the amount of your own bill unless Scarsby pays it; but I may be able to fix things up."

It was not very easy for Gorman to deal with Madame Ypsilante. Her point was that Scarsby had deliberately inflicted frightful pain on her, breaking his plighted word

and taking advantage of her helpless position.

"He is a devil, that man," she said. "Never, never in life has there been any such devil. I did right to kick him. It would be more right to kick his mouth. But I am not a dancer. I cannot kick so high."

"Corinne," said the king. "You have suffered. He has suffered. It is, as the English say in the game of golf 'lie as you like.' Let us forgive and regret."

"I do not regret," said Madame, "except that I did not kick with both feet. I do not regret, and I will not forgive."

"The trouble is," said Gorman, "that the dentist won't forgive either. He's talking of a thousand pounds damage."

Madame's face softened.

"If he will pay a thousand pounds—" she said. "It is not much. It is not enough. Still, if he pays at once—"

"You've got it wrong," said Gorman. "He thinks you ought to pay. He's going to law about it."

"Law!" said Madame. "Pouf! What is your law? I spit at it. It is to laugh at, the law."

The king took a different view. He knew by painful experience something about law, chiefly that part of the law which deals with the relations of creditor and debtor. He was seriously alarmed at what Gorman said.

"Alas, Corinne," he said, "in Megalia, yes. But in England, no. The English law is to me a black beast. With the law I am always the escaping goat who does not escape. Gorman, I love your England. But there is, as you say, a shift in the flute. In England there is too much law. Do not, do not let the dentist go to law. Rather would I—"

"I will not pay," said Madame.

"Corinne," said the king reproachfully, "would I ask it? No. But if the dentist seeks revenge I will submit. He may kick me."

"That's rot of course," said Gorman. "It wouldn't be the slightest satisfaction to Scarsby to kick you. What I was going to suggest—"

"Good!" said the king. "Right-O! O.K.! Put it there. You suggest. Always, Gorman, you suggest, and when you suggest, it is all over except to shout."

"I don't know about that," said Gorman. "My plan may not work, and any way you won't like it. It's not an agreeable plan at all. The only thing to be said for it is that it's better than paying or having any more kicking. You'll have to put yourself in my hands absolutely."

"Gorman, my friend," said the king, "I go in your hands. In both hands or in one hand. Rather than be plaintiff-de-

fendant I say 'Gorman, I will go in your pocket.'"

"In your hands," said Madame, "or in your arms. Sir Gorman, I trust you. I give you my Konrad into your hands. I fling myself into your arms if you wish it."

"I don't wish it in the least," said Gorman. "In fact it will complicate things horribly if you do."

Three days later Gorman called on Dane-Latimer at his office.

"I think," he said, "that I've got that little trouble between Madame Ypsilante and the dentist settled up all right."

"Are you sure?" said Dane-Latimer. "Scarsby is still in a furious temper. At least he was the day before yesterday. I haven't seen him since then."

"You won't see him again," said Gorman. "He has completely climbed down."

"How the deuce did you manage it?"

Gorman drew a heavy square envelope from his breast pocket and handed it to Dane-Latimer.

"That's for you," he said, "and if you really want to understand how the case was settled you'd better accept the invitation and come with me."

Dane-Latimer opened the envelope and drew out a large white card with gilt edges and nicely rounded corners.

"10 Beaulieu Gardens, S.W." he read.

"Mrs. J. de Montford Scarsby. At Home, Thursday, June 24, 9 to 11. To have the honour of meeting His Majesty the King of Megalia. R.S.V.P."

"The king," said Gorman, "is going in his uniform as Field Marshal of the Megalian Army. It took me half an hour to persuade him to do that, and I don't wonder. It's a most striking costume—light blue silk blouse, black velvet gold-embroidered waistcoat, white corded breeches, immense patent leather boots, a gold chain as thick as a cable of a small yacht with a dagger at the end of it, and a bright red fur cap with a sham diamond star in front. The poor man will look an awful ass, and feel it. I wouldn't have let him in for the uniform if I could possibly have helped it, but that brute Scarsby was as vindictive as a red Indian and as obstinate as a swine. His wife could do nothing with him at first. She came to me with tears and said she'd have to give up the idea of entertaining the king at her party if his coming depended on Scarsby's withdrawing his action against Madame Ypsilante. I told her to have another try and promised her he'd come in uniform if she succeeded. That induced her to tackle her husband again. I don't know how she managed it, but she did. Scarsby has climbed down and doesn't even ask for an apology. I advise you to come to the party."

"Will Madame Ypsilante be there?"

"I hope not," said Gorman. "I shall persuade her to stay at home if I can. I don't know whether Scarsby will show up or not; but its better to take no risks. She might kick him again."

"What I was wondering," said Dane-Latimer, "was whether she'd kick me. She might feel that she ought to get a bit of her own back out of the plaintiff's solicitor. I'm not a tall man. She could probably reach my face, and I don't want to have Scarsby mending up my teeth afterwards."

"My impression is," said Gorman, "that Mrs. Scarsby would allow any one to kick her husband up and down Piccadilly if she thought she'd be able to entertain royalty afterwards. I don't think she ever got higher than a Marquis before. By the way, poor Konrad Karl is to have a throne at the end of her drawing-room, and I'm to present her. You really ought to come, Dane-Latimer."

XII

A COMPETENT MECHANIC

THE car swept across the narrow bridge and round the corner beyond it. Geoffrey Dane opened the throttle a little and allowed the speed to increase. The road was new to him, but he had studied his map carefully and he knew that a long hill, two miles or more of it, lay before him. His car was highly powered and the engine was running smoothly. He looked forward to a swift, exhilarating rush from the river valley behind him to the plateau of the moorlands above. The road was a lonely one. Since he left a village, three miles behind him, he had met nothing but one cart and a couple of stray cattle. It was very unlikely that he would meet any troublesome traffic before he reached the outskirts of Hamley, the market town six miles beyond the hill and the moorland. The car swept forward, gathering speed. Geoffrey Dane saw the hand of his speedometer creep round the dial till it showed forty miles an hour.

Then rounding a bend in the road he saw another car motionless in the very middle of

the road. Geoffrey Dane swore abruptly and slowed down. He was not compelled to stop. He might have passed the obstructing car by driving with one wheel in the ditch. But he was a young man with a troublesome conscience, and he was a member of the Royal Automobile Club. He was bound in honour to render any help he could to motorists in distress on the high road.

On a stone at the side of the road sat a girl, smoking a cigarette. She was, apparently, the owner or driver of the motionless car. Geoffrey Dane stopped.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

The girl threw away the cigarette she was smoking and stood up.

"Everything," she said.

Geoffrey Dane stopped his engine with a sigh and got out of his car. He noticed at once that the girl was dishevelled, that her face, particularly her nose, was smeared with dirt, and that there was a good deal of mud on her frock. He recognised the signs of a long and useless struggle with an engine; but he was too well bred to smile. He also noticed that the girl was pretty, slight of figure, and fair, with twinkling eyes. This consoled him a little. Succouring a stranger in distress on a lonely road towards the close of a winter afternoon is not pleasant, but it is distinctly less unpleasant if the stranger is a pretty girl.

"Do you know anything about motors?" said the girl.

To Geoffrey the question was almost insulting. He was a young man who particularly prided himself on his knowledge of mechanics and his skill in dealing with engines. Also the girl spoke abruptly, not at all in the manner of a helpless damsel seeking charitable assistance. But Geoffrey was a good-humoured young man and the girl was very pretty indeed. He was prepared to make allowances for a little petulance. No temper is exactly sunny after a struggle with a refractory engine.

"I ought to know something about motors," he said. "I'm driving one."

He looked round as he spoke at his own large and handsome car. The girl's car in comparison, was insignificant.

"It doesn't in the least follow that you know anything about it," said the girl. "I was driving that one." She pointed to the car in the middle of the road. "And I haven't the remotest idea what's wrong."

This time Geoffrey felt that the girl, though pretty, deserved a snub. He was prepared to help her, at some personal inconvenience, but he felt that he had a right to expect politeness in return.

"I don't think you ought to have drawn up right in the middle of the road," he said. "It's beginning to get dark and if anything

came down the road at all fast there'd be an accident."

"I didn't draw up in the middle of the road," said the girl.

Geoffrey looked at her car. It was in the middle, the very middle of the road.

"I didn't draw up at all," said the girl. "The beastly thing just stopped there itself. But I don't mind telling you that if I could, I'd have turned the car across the road so as to block the way altogether. I'd rather there wasn't any room to pass. I wanted anyone who came along to stop and help me."

Geoffrey remained polite, which was very much to his credit.

"I see she's a Ford," he said, "and Fords are a bit hard to start sometimes, especially in cold weather. I'll have a try."

He went to the front of the car and seized the crank handle. He swung it, jerked it, pulled at it with his full strength. There was a slight gurgling noise occasionally, but the engine refused to start. Geoffrey stood erect and wiped his forehead. The evening was chilly, but he had no reason to complain of being cold. The girl sat on her stone at the side of the road and smoked a fresh cigarette.

"I don't think you'll do much good that way," she said. "I've been at that for hours."

Geoffrey felt there was, or ought to be, a difference between the efforts of a girl, a slight, rather frail looking girl, and those of a vigorous young man. He took off his overcoat and tried again, vainly. Then he opened the throttle wide, and advanced the sparking lever a little.

"If you do that," said the girl, "she'll back-fire and break your arm—that is to say if she does anything at all, which she probably won't. She sprained father's wrist last week. That's how I come to be driving her to-day."

Geoffrey was aware of the unpleasant effects of a back-fire. But he took the risk without hesitating. Nothing happened. The car, though obstinate, was not apparently malicious.

"There must be something wrong," he said. "Did you try the sparking plugs?"

"I had them all out," said the girl, "and cleaned them with a hairpin and my pocket handkerchief. It isn't worth your while to take them out again."

Geoffrey fetched a wrench from his own car and began to work on the sparking plugs.

"I see you don't believe me." said the girl. "But I really did clean them. Just look."

She held up her pocket handkerchief. It was thickly smeared with soot. She had certainly cleaned something with it.

Geoffrey worked away steadily with his wrench.

"And the worst of it is," said the girl, "that this is just the sort of evening on which one simply must blow one's nose. I've had to blow mine twice since I cleaned the plugs and I expect its awful."

Geoffrey looked up from his work. He had noticed when he first saw her that her face was very dirty. He knew now where the dirt came from. He smiled. The girl smiled, too. Her temper was beginning to improve. Then she sniffed. Geoffrey offered her his pocket handkerchief. She took it without saying thank you.

The sparking plugs were cleaned very carefully, for the second time. Then Geoffrey took another turn at the crank handle. He laboured in vain. The engine did not respond with so much as a gasp.

"The next thing I did," said the girl, "was to take out the commutator and clean it. But I don't advise you to do that unless you really do know something about engines."

It was Geoffrey's turn to feel a little irritated.

"I'm a competent mechanic," he said shortly.

"All right," said the girl, "don't be angry. I'm a competent mechanic, too. At least I thought I was before this happened."

"Perhaps," said Geoffrey, "you didn't

put the commutator back right after you took it out. I've known people make mistakes about that."

His suspicion was unjust. The commutator was in its place and the wire terminals correctly attached. He took it out again, cleaned it, oiled it, and replaced it. Then he tried the crank handle again. The engine was entirely unaffected.

"The feed pipe must be choked," said Geoffrey decisively.

"I didn't try that," said the girl, "but you can if you like. I'll lend you a hairpin. The one I cleaned the plugs with must be lying about somewhere."

It was getting dark, and a search for a lost hairpin would be very little use. Geoffrey said he would try blowing through the feed pipe with the pump. The girl, coming to his assistance, struck matches and held them dangerously near the carburetter while he worked. The clearing of the feed pipe made no difference at all to the engine. It was quite dark and freezing hard when the job was finished. Geoffrey, exhausted and breathless, gave up his final attempt at the starting crank.

"Look here," he said, "I'm awfully sorry; but I'll have to chuck it. I've tried everything I can think of. The only thing to do is to send someone out from the nearest town. If I had a rope, I'd tow you in, but

I haven't. Is there a motor man in Hamley?"

"Yes," said the girl, "there's a man called Jones, who does motors, but—"

"Well," said Geoffrey, "you get into my car. I'll drive you home, and then—by the way, where do you live?"

"In Hamley. My father's the doctor there."

"That's all right. I'll drive you home and send out Jones."

"The worst of that is," said the girl, "that Jones always charges the most frightful sums for anything he does."

"But you can't stay here all night," said Geoffrey. "All night! It'll be all day to-morrow too. As far as I can see it'll be always. You'll never make that car go."

"If father was in any ordinary temper," said the girl, "he wouldn't grouse much about Jones's bill. But just now, on account of what happened to him—"

"Yes," said Geoffrey. "I understand. The sprained wrist makes him irritable."

"It's not exactly that," said the girl. "Anyone might sprain a wrist. There's no disgrace about that. The real trouble is that the poor old dear put some stuff on his wrist, to cure it, you know. It must have been the wrong stuff, for it brought on erysipelas."

"I thought you said he was a doctor."

"That's just it. He thinks that no one will believe in him any more now that he's doctored his own wrist all wrong. That's what makes him depressed. I told him not to mind; but he does."

"The best doctors make mistakes sometimes," said Geoffrey.

"Everybody does," said the girl. "Even competent mechanics aren't always quite sure about things, are they? Now you see why I don't want to send out Jones if I can possibly help it."

"But you can't posssibly help it," said Geoffrey.

He wondered whether he could offer to pay Jones's bill himself. It would not, he supposed, be very large, and he would have been glad to pay it to save the girl from trouble. But he did not like to make the offer.

"We might," he said, "persuade Jones not to send in his bill till your father's wrist is better. Anyhow, there's nothing for it but to get him. We'll just push your car to the side of the road out of the way and then I'll run you into Hamley."

The car was pushed well over to the side of the road, and left on a patch of grass. Geoffrey shoved hard at the spokes of one of the back wheels. The girl pushed, with one hand on a lamp bracket. She steered with the other, and added a good deal to Geoffrey's

labour by turning the wheel the wrong way occasionally.

The drive to Hamley did not take long; but it was nearly half-past six before they reached the village street. Jones's shop and motor garage were shut up for the night; but a kindly bystander told Geoffrey where the man lived. Unfortunately, the man was not at home. His wife, who seemed somewhat aggrieved at his absence, gave it as her opinion that he was likely to be found in the George Inn.

"But it isn't no use your going there for him," she said. "There's a Freemason's dinner to-night, and Jones wouldn't leave that, not if you offered him a ten-pound note."

Geoffrey turned to the girl.

"Shall we try?" he asked. "Is it worth while going after him?"

"I can't leave the car on the side of the road all night," she said. "If we can't get Jones, I must walk back and try again."

Geoffrey made a heroic resolve.

"I'll leave you at home first," he said, "and then I'll go and drag Jones out of that dinner party of his. I'm sure you must be very tired."

But the girl firmly refused to go home without the car. Her plan was to go back with Jones, if Jones could be persuaded to start, and then drive home when the car was set right.

"Very well," said Geoffrey, "let's go and get Jones. We'll all go back together. I can stop the night in Hamley and go on to-morrow morning."

He rather expected a protest from the girl, a protest ending in warm thanks for his kindness. He received instead a remark which rather surprised him.

"I daresay," she said, "that you'd rather like to see what really is the matter with the car. It will be so much knowledge gained for you afterwards. And you do take an interest in mechanics, don't you?"

Geoffrey, in the course of his operations on the car, had several times professed a deep interest in mechanics. He recollected that, just at first, he had boasted a good deal about his skill and knowledge. He suspected that the girl was laughing at him. This irritated him, and when he reached the George Inn he was in no mood to listen patiently to Jones's refusal to leave his dinner.

Jones did refuse, firmly and decisively. Geoffrey argued with him, attempted to bribe him, finally swore at him. The girl stood by and laughed. Jones turned on her truculently.

"If young ladies," he said, "would stay in their homes, which is the proper place for them, and not go driving about in motor cars, there'd be less trouble in the world; and decent men who work hard

all day would be left to eat their dinners in peace."

The girl was entirely unabashed.

"If decent men," she said, "would think more about their business and less about their dinners, motors wouldn't break down six miles from home. You were supposed to have overhauled that car last week, Jones, and you told father yourself that the engine was in first rate order."

"No engine will go," said Jones, "if you don't know how to drive it."

"Look here," said Geoffrey, "hop into my car. I'll have you there in less than half an hour. We'll bring a rope with us, and if you can't make the car start at once, we'll tow it home. It won't be a long job. I'll undertake to have you back here in an hour. Your dinner won't be cold by that time."

He took Jones by the arm and pulled him towards the door of the inn. Jones, protesting and muttering, gave way at last. He fetched his hat and coat, and took a seat in Geoffrey's car.

Geoffrey made good his promise. Once clear of the town, with an empty road before him, he drove fast and reached the scene of the breakdown in less than twenty minutes.

Jones was evidently sulky. Without speaking a word to either Geoffrey or the girl he went straight to the car at the side

of the road. He gave the starting handle a single turn. Then he stopped and went to the back of the car. He took out a tin of petrol and emptied it into the tank. Then he gave another jerk to the starting handle. The engine responded at once with a cheerful rattle. The girl, to Geoffrey's amazement, laughed loud. He felt abashed and humiliated, very little inclined to mirth.

"I'm awfully sorry," he babbled his apologies. "I'm really awfully sorry. It was extremely stupid of me, but I never thought——. Of course I ought to have looked at the petrol tank first thing."

"It was a bit stupid of you, I must say," said the girl, "considering what you said about understanding motors."

Geoffrey felt inclined to remind her that she, too, had boasted some knowledge of cars and that she had been at fault even more than he had, and that in fact she ought to have guessed that her petrol had gone. He was saved from making his retort by Jones. Ignoring the girl completely, as if she were beneath contempt, Jones spoke to Geoffrey.

"I dunno," he said, "how you expected the engine to work without petrol."

His tone was full of scorn, and Geoffrey felt like a withered flower. The girl was in no way abashed.

"It's just like asking a man to work

without his dinner," she said, "but they sometimes do, you know."

Then she turned to Geoffrey.

"If you promise faithfully," she said, "not to tell father what happened, you can come and have dinner with us to-night."

It was the only sign of gratitude that the girl had shown, and Geoffrey's first inclination was to refuse the invitation definitely. But he caught sight of her face before she spoke. She was standing in the full glare of one of the lamps. Her eyes were twinkling and very bright. On her lips was a smile, impudent, provocative, extremely attractive.

Geoffrey Dane dined that night with the doctor and his daughter. He described the breakdown of the motor in the vaguest terms.

XIII

MY NIECE KITTY.

I CONSIDER it fortunate that Kitty is my niece. She might have been my daughter and then I should have had a great deal of responsibility and lived a troublous life. On the other hand if Kitty had not been related to me in some way I should have missed a pleasant intimacy. I should probably very seldom see her if she were the daughter of a casual acquaintance, and when I did see her she would be shy, perhaps, or pert. I should almost certainly be awkward. I am, I regret to say, fifty years of age. Kitty is just sixteen. Some kind of relationship is necessary if there is to be real friendship between an elderly man and a young girl. Uncles, if they did not exist in nature, would have to be invented for the sake of people like Kitty and myself.

I see Kitty twice a year regularly. She and her mother come to town at Christmas time for shopping. They stay at my house. In summer I spend my three weeks holiday with my sister who lives all the year round

in a seaside place which most people regard as a summer resort. She does this on account of the delicate health of her husband, who suffers from an obscure nervous disease. If I were Kitty's father I should probably have a nervous disorder, too.

In December I am master of the situation. I treat Kitty exactly as an uncle ought to treat a niece. I take her to theatres and picture houses. I feed her at irregular hours on sweet, unwholesome food. I buy her presents and allow her to choose them. Kitty, as my guest, behaves as well as any niece could. She is respectful, obedient, and always delighted with the entertainments I provide for her. In summer—Kitty being then the hostess and I the guest—things are different. She considers it her duty to amuse me. Her respect for me vanishes. I am the one who is obedient; but I am not always delighted at the entertainments she provides. She means well, but she is liable to forget that a stiff-limbed bachelor of fifty prefers quiet to strenuous sports.

One morning during the second week of my last holiday Kitty came down late for breakfast. She is often late for breakfast and she never apologises. I daresay she is right. Most of us are late for breakfast, when we are late, because we are lazy and

stay too long in bed. It is impossible to think of Kitty being lazy. She always gets up early and is only late for breakfast because she has had time to find some enthralling occupation before breakfast is ready. Breakfast and the rest of the party ought to apologise to her for not being ready sooner. It is really we who keep her waiting. She was dressed that morning in a blue cotton frock, at least two inches longer than the frocks she used to wear last year. If her face had not been as freckled as a turkey's egg and the skin had not been peeling off her nose with sunburn she would have looked very pretty. Next year, I suppose, her frocks will be down to her ankles and she will be taking care of her complexion. Then, no doubt, she will look very pretty. But she will not look any more demure than she did that morning.

"It is always right," she said, "to do good when we can, and to show kindness to those whose lot in life is less happy than our own."

When Kitty looks particularly demure and utters sentiments of that kind, as if she were translating one of Dr. Watts' hymns into prose, I know that there is trouble coming. I did not have to wait long to find out what was in store.

"Claire Lane's aunt," she said, "does a great deal of work for the children of the

very poor. That is a noble thing to do."

It is. I have heard of Miss Lane's work. Indeed I give a subscription every year towards carrying it on.

"Claire," Kitty went on, "is my greatest friend at school, and she sometimes helps her aunt. Claire is rather noble too, though not so noble as Miss Lane."

"I am glad to hear," I said, "that you have such a nice girl for a friend. I suppose it was from her you learnt that it was right to show kindness to those whose lot is less happy than our own."

Kitty referred to a letter which she had brought with her into the room, and then said:

"To-day Claire and her aunt are bringing fifty children down here to spend the day playing on the beach and paddling in the sea. That will cost a lot and I expect you to subscribe, Uncle John."

I at once handed Kitty all the money I had in my pocket. She took it without a word of thanks. It was quite a respectable sum, perhaps deserving a little gratitude, but I did not grudge it. I felt I was getting off cheap if I only had to give money. My sister, Kitty's mother, understood the situation better.

"I suppose I must send down bread and jam," she said. "Did you say fifty children, Kitty?"

"Fifty or sixty," said Kitty.

"Three pots of jam and ten loaves ought to be enough," said my sister.

"And cake," said Kitty. "They must have cake. Uncle John," she turned to me, "would you rather cut up bread and jam or walk over to the village and bring back twenty-five pounds of cake?"

I was not going to get off so easily as I hoped. The day was hot, far too hot for walking, and the village is two miles off; but I made my choice without hesitation. I greatly prefer heat to stickiness and I know no stickier job than making bread and jam sandwiches.

"If you start at once," said Kitty, "you'll be back in time to help me with the bread and jam."

I regret to say I was back in time to spread the jam out of the last pot.

Miss Lane's party arrived by train at 12 o'clock. By that time I had discovered that I had not bought freedom with my subscription, nor earned the title of noble by walking to the village. I was expected to spend the rest of the day helping to amuse Miss Lane's picnic party. Kitty and I met them when they arrived.

Miss Lane, the aunt, is a very plump lady with nice white hair. Her face, when she got out of the train, was glistening with perspiration. Claire, the niece, is a pretty

little girl. She wore a pink frock, but it was no pinker than her face. Her efforts to show kindness to the children in the train had been too much for her. She was tired, bewildered, and helpless. There were fifty-six children, all girls, and they ranged in age from about 13 years down to toddling infants. Miss Lane, the aunt, asked me to count them for her. I suppose she wanted to make sure that she had not lost any on the way down and that she would have as many to take home as she had when she started. Left to my own resources I could not possibly have counted fifty delirious children, not one of whom stood still for a single instant. Kitty came to my rescue. She coursed up and down among the children, shouting, pushing, occasionally slapping in a friendly way, and, at last, corralled the whole party in a corner between two sheds. I have seen a well-trained sheep dog perform a similar feat in much the same way. I counted the flock, with some difficulty even then, and noted the number carefully in my pocket book. Then there was a wild rush for the beach. Miss Lane headed it at first, carrying one of the smallest children in her arms and dragging another by the hand. She was soon overtaken and passed by Kitty and six lean, long-legged girls, who charged whooping, straight for the sea. Claire and I followed slowly at

the tail of the procession. I was sorry for her because one of her shoes was beginning to hurt her. She confided this to me and later on in the day I could see that the pain was acute. We reached the beach in time to see Kitty dragging off her shoes and stockings. Eight or ten of the girls had walked straight into the sea and were splashing about up to their knees in water. Kitty went after them and dragged them back. She said that if they wanted to bathe they ought to take their clothes off. Kitty is a good swimmer, and I think she wanted those children to bathe so as to have a chance of saving their lives when they began to drown. Fortunately, Miss Lane discovered what was going on and put a stop to the bathing. She was breathless but firm. I do not know whether she shrank from drowning the children or held conventional ideas about the necessity of bathing dresses for girls. Whatever her reasons were she absolutely forbade bathing. The day was extraordinarily hot and our work was most strenuous. We paddled, and I had to wade in several times, far above the part of my legs to which it was possible to roll up my trousers. We built elaborate sand castles, and enormous mounds, which Kitty called redoubts. I was made to plan a series of trenches similar to those used by the armies in France, and we had a most exciting battle,

during which Kitty compelled me to become a casualty so that six girls might have the pleasure of dragging me back to a place of safety. We very nearly had a real casualty afterwards when the roof of a dug-out fell in and buried two infants. Kitty and I rescued them, digging frenziedly with our hands. Miss Lane scooped the sand out of their mouths afterwards with her fore-finger, and dried their eyes when they had recovered sufficiently to cry. We fed the whole party on buns and lemonade and became sticky from head to foot. We ran races and had tugs-of-war with a rope made of stockings tied together. It was not a good rope because it always broke at the most exciting moments but that only added to our pleasure; for both teams fell flat on their backs when the rope gave way, and Miss Lane looked particularly funny rolling on the sand.

At six o'clock the gardener and the cook, sent by Kitty's mother, came down from the house carrying a large can of milk and a clothes basket full of bread and jam and cake. We were all glad to see them. Even the most active children were becoming exhausted and were willing to sit down and be fed. I was very nearly done up. Poor Claire was seated on a stone, nursing her blistered foot. Only Miss Lane and Kitty had any energy left, and Miss Lane

was in an appalling state of heat. Kitty remained cool, owing perhaps to the fact that she was soaked through from the waist down, having carried twenty or thirty dripping infants out of the sea in the course of the day.

My sister's gardener, who carried the milk, is a venerable man with a long white beard. He is greatly stooped from constant digging and he suffers from rheumatism in his knees. It was his appearance, no doubt, which suggested to Kitty the absolutely fiendish idea of an obstacle race for veterans. The veterans, of course, were Miss Lane, the gardener, the cook, who was a very fat woman, and myself. Miss Lane agreed to the proposal at once with apparent pleasure, and the whole fifty-six children shouted with joy. The gardener, who has known Kitty since she was born, recognised the uselessness of protest and took his place beside Miss Lane. The cook said she never ran races and could not jump. Any one who had looked at her would have known she was speaking the truth. But Kitty would take no refusal. She took that cook by the arm and dragged her to the starting line.

The course, which was arranged by Kitty, was a stiff one. It took us over all the redoubts, castles, and trenches we had built during the day and across a tract of par-

ticularly soft sand, difficult to walk over and most exhausting to any one who tried to run. It finished up with what Kitty called a water jump, though no one could possibly have jumped it. It was a wide, shallow pool, formed in the sand by the flowing tide and the only way of getting past it was to wade through.

I felt fairly confident I should win that race. The gardener is ten years older than I am and very stiff in the joints. The cook plainly did not mean to try. Miss Lane is far past the age at which women cease to be active, and was badly handicapped by having to run in a long skirt. I started at top speed and cleared the first redoubt without difficulty, well ahead of any one else. I kept my lead while I floundered through three trenches, and increased it among the castles which lay beyond. When I reached the soft sand I ventured to look back. I was gratified to see that the cook had given up. The gardener was in difficulties at the second trench, and Miss Lane had fallen. When I saw her she was sprawling over a sand castle, surrounded by cheering children. It did not seem likely that she would have strength enough to get up again or breath to run any more if she did get on her feet. I felt that I was justified in walking quietly over the soft sand. Beyond it lay a tract of smooth, hard sand, near the sea, and then

the water jump. My supporters, a number of children who had easily kept pace with me and were encouraging me with shouts, seemed disappointed when I dropped to a walk. To please them I broke into a gentle trot when I reached the hard sand. I still felt perfectly sure that the race was mine.

I was startled out of my confidence by the sound of terrific yells, just as I stepped cautiously into the water jump. I looked round and saw Miss Lane. Her hair was flying behind her in a wild tangle. Her petticoats were gathered well above her knees. She was crossing the hard sand at a tremendous pace. I saw that my only chance was to collect my remaining energies for a spurt. Before I had made the attempt Miss Lane was past me. She jumped a clear eight feet into the shallow water in which I stood and came down with a splash which nearly blinded me with spray. I rubbed the salt water out of my eyes and started forward. It was too late. Miss Lane was ten or twelve yards ahead of me. She was splashing through the water quicker than I should have believed possible. She stumbled, and once I thought she was down, but she did not actually fall until she flung herself, breathless, at Kitty's feet, at the winning post.

The children shrieked with joy, and Kitty said she was very glad I had been beaten.

I did not understand at the time why she was glad, but I found out afterwards. I was stiff and tired that evening but rather proud of myself. I had done something to be proud of. I had spent a whole day in showing kindness—I suppose it really was kindness—to those whose lot on other days is worse than my own; and that, as Kitty says, is a noble thing to do. I was not, however, left in peace to enjoy my pleasant mood of self-congratulation. I had just lit my cigar and settled comfortably in the verandah when Kitty came to me.

"I suppose you know," she said, "that there was a prize for that veteran's race this afternoon."

"No," I said, "I didn't know, but I'm glad to hear it. I hope Miss Lane will enjoy the prize. She certainly deserves it."

"The prize, said Kitty is ——"

To my surprise she mentioned a sum of money, quite a large sum.

"—To be paid," said Kitty, "by the losers, and to go to the funds of Miss Lane's Society for giving pleasure to poor children. The gardener and cook can't pay, of course, being poor themselves. So you'll have to pay it all."

"I haven't the money in my pocket," I said. "Will it do if I send it to-morrow?"

Kitty graciously agreed to wait till the next day. I hardly expected that she would.

"By the way, Kitty," I said, "if I'd won, and I very nearly did, would Miss Lane have paid me?"

"Of course not. Why should she? You haven't got a society for showing kindness to the poor. There'd be no sense in giving you money."

The gardener, to whom I was talking next morning, gave it to me as his opinion that "Miss Kitty is a wonderful young lady." I agreed with him and am glad that she is my niece, not my daughter.

XIV

A ROYAL MARRIAGE

MICHAEL KANE carried His Majesty's mails from Clonmethan to the Island of Inishrua. He made the voyage twice a week in a big red boat fitted with a motor engine. He had as his partner a young man called Peter Gahan. Michael Kane was a fisherman, and had a knowledge of the ways of the strange tides which race and whirl in the channel between Inishrua and the mainland. Peter Gahan looked like an engineer. He knew something about the tides, but what he really understood was the motor engine. He was a grave and silent young man who read small books about Socialism. Michael Kane was grey-haired, much battered by the weather and rich in experience of life. He was garrulous and took a humorous view of most things, even of Peter Gahan's Socialism.

There are, perhaps, two hundred people living on Inishrua, but they do not receive many letters. Nor do they write many. Most of them neither write nor receive any letters at all. A post twice a week is quite

sufficient for their needs, and Michael Kane is not very well paid for carrying the lean letter bag. But he makes a little money by taking parcels across to the island. The people of Inishrua grow, catch or shoot most of the things they want; but they cannot produce their own tea, tobacco, sugar or flour. Michael Kane takes orders for these and other things from Mary Nally, who keeps a shop on Inishrua. He buys them in Clonmethan and conveys them to the island. In this way he earns something. He also carries passengers and makes a little out of them.

Last summer, because it was stormy and wet, was a very lean season for Michael Kane. Week after week he made his journeys to Inishrua without a single passenger. Towards the middle of August he began to give up hope altogether.

He and Peter sat together one morning on the end of the pier. The red post boat hung at her moorings outside the little harbour. The day was windless and the sea smooth save for the ocean swell which made shorewards in a long procession of round-topped waves. It was a day which might have tempted even a timid tourist to visit the island. But there was no sign of anyone approaching the pier.

"I'm thinking," said Michael Kane, "that we may as well be starting. There'll be no one coming with us the day"

But he was mistaken. A passenger, an eager-looking young woman, was hurrying towards the pier while they were making up their minds to start.

Miss Ivy Clarence had prepared herself for a voyage which seemed to her something of an adventure. She wore a tight-fitting knitted cap, a long, belted, waterproof coat, meant originally to be worn by a soldier in the trenches in France. She had a thick muffler round her neck. She carried a rug, a packet of sandwiches, a small handbag and an umbrella, of all possible accoutrements the least likely to be useful in an open boat. But though she carried an umbrella, Miss Clarence did not look like a fool. She might know nothing about boats and the way to travel in them, but she had a bright, intelligent face and a self-confident decision of manner. She was by profession a journalist, and had conceived the idea of visiting Ireland and writing articles about that unfortunate country. Being an intelligent journalist she knew that articles about the state of Ireland are overdone and very tiresome. Nobody, especially during the holiday season, wants to be bored with Irish politics. But for bright, cheery descriptions of Irish life and customs, as for similar descriptions of the ways of other strange peoples, there is always a market. Miss Clarence determined to exploit it. She planned to visit five or six of

the larger islands off the Irish coast. There, if anywhere, quaint customs, picturesque superstitions and primitive ways of living might still be found.

Michael greeted her as if she had been an honoured guest. He was determined to make the trip as pleasant as he could for anyone who was wise enough to leave the tennis-courts and the golf-links.

"It's a grand day for seeing Inishrua," he said. "Not a better day there's been the whole summer up to now. And why wouldn't it be fine? It would be a queer day that wouldn't when a young lady like yourself is wanting to go on the sea."

This was the kind of speech, flattering, exaggerated, slightly surprising, which Michael Kane was accustomed to make to his passengers. Miss Clarence did not know that something of the same sort was said to every lady, young or old, who ventured into Michael's boat. She was greatly pleased and made a mental note of the words.

Michael Kane and Peter Gahan went over to a dirty and dilapidated boat which lay on the slip. They seized her by the gunwale, raised her and laid her keel on a roller. They dragged her across the slip and launched her, bow first, with a loud splash.

"Step easy now, miss," said Michael, "and lean on my shoulder. Give the young lady

your hand, Peter. Can't you see the stones is slippy?"

Peter was quite convinced that all members of the bourgeois class ought to be allowed, for the good of society, to break their legs on slippery rocks. But he was naturally a courteous man. He offered Miss Clarence an oily hand and she got safely into the boat.

The engine throbbed and the screw under the rudder revolved slowly. The boat slid forward, gathering speed, and headed out to sea for Inishrua.

Michael Kane began to talk. Like a pianist who strikes the notes of his instrument tentatively, feeling about for the right key, he touched on one subject after another, confident that in the end he would light on something really interesting to his passenger. Michael Kane was happy in this, that he could talk equally well on all subjects. He began with the coast scenery, politics and religion, treating these thorny topics with such detachment that no one could have guessed what party or what church he belonged to. Miss Clarence was no more than moderately interested. He passed on to the islanders of Inishrua, and discovered that he had at last reached the topic he was seeking. Miss Clarence listened eagerly to all he said. She even asked questions, after the manner of intelligent journalists.

"If it's the island people you want to see,

miss," he said, "it's well you came this year. There'll be none of them left soon. They're dying out, so they are."

Miss Clarence thought of a hardy race of men wringing bare subsistence from a niggardly soil, battered by storms, succumbing slowly to the impossible conditions of their island. She began to see her way to an article of a pathetic kind.

"It's sleep that's killing them off," said Michael Kane.

Miss Clarence was startled. She had heard of sleeping sickness, but had always supposed it to be a tropical disease. It surprised her to hear that it was ravaging an island like Inishrua.

"Men or women, it's the same," said Michael. "They'll sleep all night and they'll sleep the most of the day. Not a tap of work will be done on the island, summer or winter."

"But," said Miss Clarence, "how do they live?"

"They'll not live long," said Michael. "Amn't I telling you that they're dying out? It's the sleep that's killing them."

Miss Clarence drew a large notebook and a pencil from her bag. Michael was greatly pleased. He went on to tell her that the Inishrua islanders had become enormously rich during the war. Wrecked ships had drifted on to their coasts in dozens. They had gathered in immense stores of oil, petrol,

cotton, valuable wood and miscellaneous merchandise of every kind. There was no need for them to work any more. Digging, ploughing, fishing, toil of every kind was unnecessary. All they had to do was eat and sleep, waking up now and then for an hour or two to sell their spoils to eager buyers who came to them from England.

Michael could have gone on talking about the immense riches of the islanders. He would have liked to enlarge upon the evil consequences of having no work to do, the inevitable extinction which waits for those who merely sleep. But he was conscious that Peter Gahan was becoming uneasy. As a good socialist, Peter knew that work is an unnecessary evil, and that men will never be healthy or happy until they escape from the tyranny of toil. He was not likely to listen patiently to Michael's doctrine that a race of sleepers is doomed to extinction. At any moment he might burst into the conversation argumentatively. And Michael Kane did not want that. He liked to do all the talking himself. He switched off the decay of the islanders and started a new subject which he hoped would be equally interesting to Miss Clarence.

"It's a lucky day you have for visiting the island," he said. "But sure you know that yourself, and there's no need for me to be telling you."

Beyond the fact that the day was moderately fine, Miss Clarence did not know that there was anything specially lucky about it. She looked enquiringly at Michael Kane.

"It's the day of the King's wedding," said Michael.

To Miss Clarence "the King" suggested his Majesty George V. But he married some time ago, and she did not see why the islanders should celebrate an event of which most people have forgotten the date. She cast round in her mind for another monarch likely to be married; but she could not think of any. There are not, indeed, very many kings left in the world now. Peter Gahan gave a vicious dab at his engine with his oil-can, and then emerged feet first from the shelter of the fore deck. This talk about kings irritated him.

"It's the publican down by the harbour Michael Kane's speaking about," he said. "King, indeed! What is he, only an old man who's a deal too fat!"

"He may be fat," said Michael; "but if he is, he's not the first fat man to get married. And he's a king right enough. There's always been a king on Inishrua, the same as in England."

Miss Clarence was aware—she had read the thing somewhere—that the remoter and less civilised islands off the Irish coast are ruled by chieftains to whom their people give

the title of King.

"The woman he's marrying," said Michael, "is one by the name of Mary Nally, the same that keeps the post-office and sells tobacco and tea and suchlike."

"If he's marrying her to-day," said Peter Gahan, "it's the first I heard of it."

"That may be," said Michael, "but if you was to read less you'd maybe hear more. You'd hardly believe," he turned to Miss Clarence with a smile—"you'd hardly believe the time that young fellow wastes reading books and the like. There isn't a day passes without he'd be reading something, good or bad."

Peter Gahan, thoroughly disgusted, crept under the fore deck again and squirted drops of oil out of his can.

Miss Clarence ought to have been interested in the fact that the young boatman was fond of reading. His tastes in literature and his eagerness for knowledge and culture would have provided excellent matter for an article. But the prospect of a royal marriage on Inishrua excited her, and she had no curiosity left for Peter Gahan and his books. She asked a string of eager questions about the festivities. Michael was perfectly willing to supply her with information; indeed, the voyage was not long enough for all her questions and his answers. Before the subject was exhausted

the boat swung round a rocky point into the bay where the Inishrua harbour lies.

"You see the white cottage with the double gable, Miss," said Michael. "Well, it's there Mary Nally lives. And that young lad crossing the field is her brother coming down for the post-bag. The yellow house with the slates on it is where the king lives. It's the only slated house they have on the island. God help them!"

Peter Gahan slowed and then stopped his engine. The boat slipped along a grey stone pier. Michael stepped ashore and made fast a couple of ropes. Then he gave his hand to Miss Clarence and helped her to disembark.

"If you're thinking of taking a walk through the island, Miss," he said, "you'll have time enough. There's no hurry in the world about starting home. Two hours or three will be all the same to us."

Michael Kane was in no hurry. Nor was Peter Gahan, who had taken a pamphlet from his pocket and settled himself on the edge of the pier with his feet dangling over the water. But Miss Clarence felt that she had not a moment to lose. She did not want to miss a single detail of the wedding festivities. She stood for an instant uncertain whether she should go first to the yellow, slated house of the bridegroom or cross the field before her to the double-

gabled cottage where the bride lived. She decided to go to the cottage. In any ordinary wedding the bride's house is the scene of most activity, and no doubt the same rule holds good in the case of royal marriages.

The door of the cottage stood open, and Miss Clarence stepped into a tiny shop. It was the smallest shop she had ever seen, but it was crammed from ceiling to floor with goods.

Behind the counter a woman of about thirty years of age sat on a low stool. She was knitting quietly, and showed no sign whatever of the excitment which usually fills a house on the day of a wedding. She looked up when Miss Clarence entered the shop. Then she rose and laid aside her knitting. She had clear, grey eyes, an unemotional, self-confident face, and a lean figure.

"I came to see Miss Mary Nally," said Miss Clarence. "Perhaps if she isn't too busy I could have a chat with her."

"Mary Nally's my name," said the young woman quietly.

Miss Clarence was surprised at the calm and self-possession of the woman before her. She had, in the early days of her career as a journalist, seen many brides. She had never seen one quite so cool as Mary Nally. And this woman was going to marry a king! Miss Clarence, startled out of her own self-

control, blurted out more than she meant to say.

"But—but aren't you going to be married?" she said.

Mary Nally smiled without a sign of embarrassment.

"Maybe I am," she said, "some day."

"To-day," said Miss Clarence.

Mary Nally, pulling aside a curtain of pendent shirts, looked out through the window of the little shop. She knew that the post boat had arrived at the pier and that her visitor, a stranger on the island, must have come in her. She wanted to make sure that Michael Kane was on board.

"I suppose now," she said, "that it was Michael Kane told you that. And it's likely old Andrew that he said I was marrying."

"He said you were going to marry the King of the island," said Miss Clarence.

"Well," said Mary Nally, "that would be old Andrew."

"But isn't it true?" said Miss Clarence.

A horrible suspicion seized her. Michael Kane might have been making a fool of her.

"Michael Kane would tell you lies as quick as look at you," she said; "but maybe it wasn't lies he was telling this time. Come along now and we'll see."

She lifted the flap of the counter behind which she sat and passed into the outer part of the shop. She took Miss Clarence by the

arm and they went together through the door. Miss Clarence expected to be led down to the pier. It seemed to her plain that Mary Nally must want to find out from Michael whether he had told this outrageous story or not. She was quite willing to face the old boatman. Mary Nally would have something bitter to say to him. She herself would say something rather more bitter and would say it more fiercely.

Mary turned to the right and walked towards the yellow house with the slate roof. She entered it, pulling Miss Clarence after her.

An oldish man, very fat, but healthy looking and strong, sat in an arm chair near the window of the room they entered. Round the walls were barrels of porter. On the shelves were bottles of whisky. In the middle of the floor, piled one on top of the other, were three cases full of soda-water bottles.

"Andrew," said Mary Nally, "there's a young lady here says that you and me is going to be married."

"I've been saying as much myself this five years," said Andrew. "Ever since your mother died. And I don't know how it is we never done it."

"It might be," said Mary, "because you never asked me."

"Sure, where was the use of my asking you," said Andrew, "when you knew as

well as myself and every one else that it was to be?"

"Anyway," said Mary, "the young lady says we're doing it, and, what's more, we're doing it to-day. What have you to say to that now, Andrew?"

Andrew chuckled in a good-humoured and tolerant way.

"What I'd say to that, Mary," he said, "is that it would be a pity to disappoint the young lady if her heart's set on it."

"It's not my heart that's set on it," said Miss Clarence indignantly. "I don't care if you never get married. It's your own hearts, both of them, that ought to be set on it."

As a journalist of some years' experience she had, of course, outgrown all sentiment. But she was shocked by the cool indifference of these lovers who were prepared to marry merely to oblige a stranger whom they had never seen before and were not likely to see again. But Mary Nally did not seem to feel that there was any want of proper ardour in Andrew's way of settling the date of their wedding.

"If you don't get up out of your chair," she said, "and be off to Father McFadden to tell him what's wanted, it'll never be done either to-day or any other day."

Andrew roused himself with a sigh. He took his hat from a peg, and a stout walking-

stick from behind a porter barrel. Then, politely but firmly, he put the two women out of the house and locked the door behind them. He was ready to marry Mary Nally —and her shop. He was not prepared to trust her among his porter barrels and his whisky bottles until the ceremony was actually completed.

The law requires that a certain decorous pause shall be made before the celebration of a marriage. Papers must be signed or banns published in church. But Father McFadden had lived so long on Inishrua that he had lost respect for law and perhaps forgotten what the law was. Besides, Andrew was King of the island by right of popular assent, and what is the use of being a king if you cannot override a tiresome law? The marriage took place that afternoon, and Miss Clarence was present, acting as a kind of bridesmaid.

No sheep or heifers were killed, and no inordinate quantity of porter was drunk. There was, indeed, no special festivity on the island, and the other inhabitants took very little notice of what was happening. They were perhaps, as Michael Kane said, too sleepy to be stirred with excitement. But in spite of the general apathy, Miss Clarence was fairly well satisfied with her experience. She felt that she had a really novel subject for the first of her articles

on the life and customs of the Irish islanders.

The one thing that vexed her was the thought that Michael Kane had been laughing at her while he talked to her on the way out to the island. On the way home she spoke to him severely.

"You've no right," she said, "to tell a pack of lies to a stranger who happens to be a passenger in your boat."

"Lies!" said Michael. "What lie was in it? Didn't I say they'd be married to-day, and they were?"

Miss Clarence might have retorted that no sheep or heifers had been killed and very little porter drunk, but she preferred to leave these details aside and stick to her main point.

"But they didn't mean to be married," she said, "and you told me——."

"Begging your pardon, miss," said Michael, "but they did mean it. Old Andrew has been meaning it ever since Mrs Nally died and left Mary with the shop. And Mary was willing enough to go with him any day he asked her. It's what I was telling you at the first go off. Them island people is dying out for the want of being able to keep from going to sleep. You seen yourself the way it was. Them ones never would have been married at all only for your going to Inishrua and waking them up. It's thankful to you they ought to be."

He appealed to Peter Gahan, who was

crouching beside his engine under the fore-deck.

"Oughtn't they to be thankful to the young lady, Peter," he said, "seeing they'd never have been married only for her?"

Peter Gahan looked out from his shelter and scowled. According to the teaching of the most advanced Socialists the marriage tie is not a blessing but a curse.

XIV

AUNT NELL

MRS. MACDERMOTT splashed her way across the yard towards the stable. It was raining, softly and persistently. The mud lay deep. There were pools of water here and there. Mrs. Macdermott neither paused nor picked her steps. There was no reason why she should. The rain could not damage the tweed cap on her head. Her complexion, brilliant as the complexions of Irish women often are, was not of the kind that washes off. Her rough grey skirt, on which rain-drops glistened, came down no further than her knees. On her feet were a pair of rubber boots which reached up to the hem of her skirt, perhaps further. She was comfortably indifferent to rain and mud.

If you reckon the years since she was born, Mrs. MacDermott was nearly forty. But that is no true way of estimating the age of man or woman. Seen, not in the dusk with the light behind her, but in broad daylight on horseback, she was little more than thirty. Such is the reward of living

an outdoor life in the damp climate of Connaught. And her heart was as young as her face and figure. She had known no serious troubles and very few of the minor cares of life. Her husband, a man twenty-five years older than she was, died after two years of married life, leaving her a very comfortable fortune. Nell MacDermott—the whole country called her Nell—hunted three days a week every winter.

"Why wouldn't she be young?" John Gafferty, the groom, used to say. "Hasn't she five good horses and the full of her skin of meat and drink? The likes of her never get old."

Johnny Gafferty was rubbing down a tall bay mare when Mrs. MacDermott opened the stable door and entered the loose box.

"Johnny," she said, "you'll put the cob in the governess cart this afternoon and have him round at three o'clock. I'm going up to the station to meet my nephew. I've had a letter from his father to say he'll be here to-day."

Johnny Gafferty, though he had been eight years in Mrs. MacDermott's service, had never before heard of her nephew.

"It could be," he said, cautiously, "that the captain will be bringing a horse with him, or maybe two."

He felt that a title of some sort was due to the nephew of a lady like Mrs. MacDermott.

The assumption that he would have a horse or two with him was natural. All Mrs. MacDermott's friends hunted.

"He's not a captain," said Mrs. MacDermott, "and he's bringing no horses and he doesn't hunt. What's more, Johnny, he doesn't even ride, couldn't sit on the back of a donkey. So his father says, anyway."

"Glory be to God!" said Johnny, "and what sort of a gentleman will he be at all?"

"He's a poet," said Mrs. MacDermott.

Johnny felt that he had perhaps gone beyond the limits of respectful criticism in expressing his first astonishment at the amazing news that Mrs. MacDermott's nephew could not ride.

"Well," he said, "there's worse things than poetry in the world."

"Very few sillier things," said Mrs. MacDermott. "But that's not the worst there is about him, Johnny. His health is completely broken down. That's why he's coming here. Nerve strain, they call it."

"That's what they would call it," said Johnny sympathetically, "when it's a high-up gentleman like a nephew of your own. And it's hard to blame him. There's many a man does be a bit foolish without meaning any great harm by it."

"To be a bit foolish" is a kindly, West of Ireland phrase which means to drink heavily.

"It's not that," said Mrs. MacDermott. "I don't believe from what I've heard of him that the man has even that much in him. It's just what his father says, poetry and nerves. And he's coming here for the good of his health. It's Mr. Bertram they call him, Mr. Bertram Connell."

Mrs. MacDermott walked up and down the platform waiting for the arrival of her nephew's train. She was dressed in a very becoming pale blue tweed and had wrapped a silk muffler of a rather brighter blue round her neck. Her brown shoes, though strong, were very well made and neat. Between them and her skirt was a considerable stretch of knitted stocking, blue like the tweed. Her ankles were singularly well-formed and comely. The afternoon had turned out to be fine and she had taken some trouble about her dress before setting out to meet a strange nephew whom she had not seen since he was five years old. She might have taken more trouble still if the nephew had been anything more exciting than a nerve-shattered poet.

The train steamed in at last. Only one passenger got out of a first-class carriage. Mrs. MacDermott looked at him in doubt. He was not in the least the sort of man she expected to see. Poets, so she understood, have long hair and sallow, clean-shaved faces. This young man's head was closely-cropped

and he had a fair moustache. He was smartly dressed in well-fitting clothes. Poets are, or ought to be, sloppy in their attire. Also, judged by the colour of his cheeks and his vigorous step, this man was in perfect health. Mrs. MacDermott approached him with some hesitation. The young man was standing in the middle of the platform looking around. His eyes rested on Mrs. MacDermott for a moment, but passed from her again. He was expecting someone whom he did not see.

"Are you Bertram Connell, by any chance?" asked Mrs. MacDermott.

"That's me," said the young man, "and I'm expecting an aunt to meet me. I say, are you a cousin? I didn't know I had a cousin."

The mistake was an excusable one. Mrs. MacDermott looked very young and pretty in her blue tweed. She appreciated the compliment paid her all the more because it was obviously sincere.

"You haven't any cousins," she said. "Not on your father's side, any way. I'm your aunt."

"Aunt Nell!" he said, plainly startled by the information. "Great Scott! and I thought——"

He paused and looked at Mrs. MacDermott with genuine surprise. Then he recovered his self-possession. He put his arm round her neck and kissed her heartily, first on

one cheek, then on the other.

Aunts are kissed by their nephews every day as a matter of course. They expect it. Mrs. MacDermott had not thought about the matter beforehand. If she had she would have taken it for granted that Bertram would kiss her, occasionally, uncomfortably and without conviction. The kisses she actually received embarrassed her. She even blushed a little and was annoyed with herself for blushing.

"There doesn't seem to be much the matter with your nerve," she said.

Bertram became suddenly grave.

"My nerves are in a rotten state," he said. "The doctor—specialist, you know, tip-top man—said the only thing for me was life in the country, fresh air, birds, flowers, new milk, all that sort of thing."

"Your father wrote all that to me," said Mrs. MacDermott.

"Poor old dad," said Bertram, "he's horribly upset about it."

Mrs. MacDermott was further puzzled about her nephew's nervous breakdown when she suggested about 7 o'clock that it was time to dress for dinner. Bertram who had been talking cheerfully and smoking a good deal, put his arm round her waist and ran her upstairs.

"Jolly thing to have an aunt like you," he said.

Mrs. MacDermott was slightly out of breath and angry with herself for blushing again. At bedtime she refused a good-night kiss with some dignity. Bertram protested.

"Oh, I say, Aunt Nell, that's all rot, you know. An aunt is just one of the people you do kiss, night and morning."

"No, you don't," she said, "and any way you won't get the chance to-morrow morning. I shall be off early. It's a hunting day."

"Can't I get a horse somewhere?" said Bertram.

Mrs. MacDermott looked at him in astonishment.

"Your father told me," she said, "that you couldn't ride and had never been on a horse in your life."

"Did he say that? The poor dad! I suppose he was afraid I'd break my neck."

"If you're suffering from nervous breakdown——"

"I am. Frightfully. That's why they sent me here."

"Then you shouldn't hunt," said Mrs. MacDermott. "You should sit quietly in the library and write poetry. That reminds me, the rector is coming to dinner to-night. I thought you'd like to meet him."

"Why? Is he a sporting old bird?"

"Not in the least; but he's the only man

about this country who knows anything about poetry. That's why I asked him."

Johnny Gafferty made a report to Mrs. MacDermott when she returned from hunting which surprised her a good deal.

"The young gentleman, ma'am," he said, "was round in the stable this morning, shortly after you leaving. And nothing would do him only for me to saddle the bay for him."

"Did you do it?"

"What else could I do," said Gafferty, "when his heart was set on it?"

"I suppose he's broken his own neck and the mare's knees," said Mrs. MacDermott.

"He has not then. Neither the one nor the other. I don't know how he'd do if you faced him with a stone wall, but the way he took the bay over the fence at the end of the paddock was as neat as ever I seen. You couldn't have done it better yourself, ma'am."

"He can ride, then?"

"Ride!" said Gafferty. "Is it ride? If his poetry is no worse nor his riding he'll make money by it yet."

The dinner with the rector was not an entire success. The clergyman, warned beforehand that he was to entertain a well-known poet, had prepared himself by reading several books of Wordsworth's Excursion. Bertram shied at the name of Wordsworth

and insisted on hearing from his aunt a detailed account of the day's run. This puzzled Mrs. MacDermott a little; but she hit upon an explanation which satisfied her. The rector was enthusiastic in his admiration of Wordsworth. Bertram, a poet himself, evidently suffered from professional jealousy. Mrs. MacDermott, who had looked forward to her nephew's visit with dread, began to enjoy it. Bertram was a cheerful young man with an easy flow of slangy conversation. His tastes were very much the same as Mrs. MacDermott's own. He smoked, and drank whisky and soda in moderate quantities. He behaved in all respects like a normal man, showing no signs of the nervousness which goes with the artistic temperament. His politeness to her and the trouble he took about her comfort in small matters were very pleasant. He had large handsome blue eyes, and Mrs. MacDermott liked the way he looked at her. His gaze expressed a frank admiration which was curiously agreeable.

A week after his arrival Mrs. MacDermott paid a high compliment to her nephew. She promised to mount him on the bay mare and take him out hunting. She had satisfied herself that Johnny Gafferty was not mistaken and that the young man really could ride. Bertram, excited and in high good-humour, succeeded, before she had time to pro-

test, in giving her a hearty kiss of gratitude.

The morning of the hunt was warm and moist. The meet was in one of the most favourable places in the country. Mrs. MacDermott, drawing on her gloves in the hall before starting, noted with gratification that her nephew's breeches were well-cut and his stock neatly fastened. Johnny Gafferty could be heard outside the door speaking to the horses which he held ready.

A telegraph boy arrived on a bicycle. He handed the usual orange envelope to Mrs. MacDermott. She tore it open impatiently and glanced at the message inside. She gave an exclamation of surprise and read the message through slowly and carefully. Then, without a word, she handed it to her nephew.

"Very sorry," the telegram ran, "only to-day discovered that Bertram had not gone to you as arranged. He is in a condition of complete prostration. Cannot start now. Connell."

"It's from my brother," said Mrs. MacDermott, "but what on earth does it mean? You're here all right, aren't you?"

"Yes," he said, "*I'm* here."

He laid a good deal of emphasis on the "I." Mrs. MacDermott looked at him with sudden suspicion.

"I've had a top-hole time," he said. "What an utterly incompetent rotter Connell

is! He had nothing on earth to do but lie low. His father couldn't have found out."

Mrs. MacDermott walked over to the door and addressed Gafferty.

"Johnny," she said, "the horses won't be wanted to-day." She turned to the young man who stood beside her. "Now," she said, "come into the library and explain what all this means."

"Oh, I say, Aunt Nell," he said, "don't let's miss the day. I'll explain the whole thing to you in the evening after dinner."

"You'll explain it now, if you can."

She led the way into the library.

"It's quite simple really," he said. "Bertram Connell, your nephew, though a poet and all that, is rather an ass."

"Are you Bertram Connell, or are you not?" said Mrs. MacDermott.

"Oh Lord, no. I'm not that sort of fellow at all. I couldn't write a line of poetry to save my life. He's—you simply can't imagine how frightfully brainy he is. All the same I rather like him. He was my fag at school and we were up together at Cambridge. I've more or less kept up with him ever since. He's more like a girl than a man, you know. I daresay that's why I liked him. Then he crocked up, nerves and that sort of thing. And they said he must come over here. He didn't like the notion a bit. I was in London just

then on leave, and he told me how he hated the idea."

"So did I," said Mrs. MacDermott.

"I said that he was a silly ass and that if I had the chance of a month in the west of Ireland in a sporting sort of house—he told me you hunted a lot—I'd simply jump at it. But the poor fellow was frightfully sick at the prospect, said he was sure he wouldn't get on with you, and that you'd simply hate him. He had a book of poetry just coming out and he was hoping to get a play of his taken on, a play about fairies. I give you my word he was very near crying, so, after a lot of talking, we hit on the idea of my coming here. He was to lie low in London so that his father wouldn't find him."

"You neither of you thought about me, apparently," said Mrs. MacDermott.

"Oh, yes we did. We thought as you hadn't seen him since he was a child that you wouldn't know him. And of course we thought you'd be frightfully old. There didn't seem to be much harm in it."

"And you—you came here and called me Aunt Nell."

"You're far the nicest aunt I've ever seen or even imagined."

"And you actually had the cheek to —"

Mrs. MacDermott stopped abruptly and blushed. She was thinking of the kisses. His thoughts followed hers, though she did

not complete the sentence.

"Only the first day," he said. "You wouldn't let me afterwards. Except once, and you didn't really let me then. I just did it. I give you my word I couldn't help it. You looked so jolly. No fellow could have helped it. I believe Bertram would have done the same, though he is a poet."

"And now," said Mrs. MacDermott, "before you go——"

"Must I go——"

"Out of this house and back to London to-day," said Mrs. MacDermott. "But before you go I'd rather like to know who you are, since you're not Bertram Connell."

"My name is Maitland, Robert Maitland, but they generally call me Bob. I'm in the 30th Lancers. I say, it was rather funny your thinking I couldn't ride and turning on that old parson to talk poetry to me."

Mrs. MacDermott allowed herself to smile.

The matter was really settled that day before Bob Maitland left for London; but it was a week later when Mrs. MacDermott announced her decision to her brother.

"There's no fool like an old fool," she wrote, "and at my age I ought to have more sense. But I took to Bob the moment I saw him, and if he makes as good a husband as he did a nephew we'll get on together all right—though he is a few years younger than I am."

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